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May 5, 1885.

Vol. XVI.

Single Number.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

No. 406.



THE MAD MAN HUNTER OR MYSTERY OF GOLDEN GULCH

BY
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EX-SCOUT.

CHAPTER I.

GOLDEN GULCH EXCITED.

THE town of Golden Gulch was wild with excitement and the streets were crowded with rough miners, who were all talking and gesticulating at once.

Such a row had not been heard in Golden Gulch since Tom Bayliss had driven into the town, some months before, his leader-reeking with foam, his wheelers nearly dead with fatigue.

For Tom had been stopped by road-agent, and although he and the messenger had stood them off and saved the treasure-box, it had been a narrow squeak, and nothing to spare.

The residents of the place, which, at that time, before the wonderful discoveries had been made in the vicinity, had been called simply "The Gulch," when the yellow metal began to pour in had come to the conclusion

The Mad Man-Hunter.

that the name was not worthy of the reputation of the proud young town.

So with much ceremony the new appellation was bestowed and champagne—warranted pure—cider—flowed like water.

And as the festivities had occurred only the night before the attack on the stage-coach, the sponsors had thought that the attempt to rob "Ol' man Bayliss" was a slur on the place.

So they had quickly organized and ridden off after the band, and coming unexpectedly on them, had left them swinging to several convenient trees, a warning to all evil-doers.

But the excitement of that night, memorable even in that lawless town, was as nothing compared to the present tumult.

One of the crowd, a tall, fine-looking fellow who had at one time been the leading gambler of the place, and was then known as Faro Frank, had mounted a huge box and begun to harangue to the crowd.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am in favor of settling this business right now. One of our leading men has been found on the main road, not a mile from town, lying in the agonies of death, his throat cut and a cross gashed on his forehead."

"When such a deed as this can be committed so near to this place and in broad daylight, who dare say that his own life is safe?"

"Who among you but will regard his neighbor with suspicion?"

"For this suspicion rests upon all of us alike: I am not free from it, *you* are not, *you* are not, nor *you* nor *you*!" And as the words rung out, he pointed in every direction, not designating any particular persons, but including all in the gesture made by his accusing finger.

"And it is due to ourselves that we be free from this suspicion, and I now propose to you that we immediately organize ourselves into a committee, with regularly appointed officers, whose duty it shall be to designate his duty to every man enrolled."

"What do you say?"
A tumult of voices arose in answer to this question, but as they were all in the affirmative quiet was soon restored.

In fact it would have been as much as a man's life would have been worth to have raised a dissenting voice.

Then Frank continued:
"There is no necessity of our holding a regular meeting; with your permission I will act as temporary chairman."

"Who shall be your leader?"

A tall, brawny miner, a perfect giant, with a voice like a fog-horn, elbowed his way to near Frank's rostrum and shouted:

"Boys, I propose Mr. Frank Francis for captain. Wot does yer say?"

Again the roar broke out in the affirmative and when silence had been partially restored, the first speaker thanked the crowd for the honor, and then added:

"With your permission, gentlemen, I will appoint my brother and Diamond Dan as my assistants."

"An' no two better could be chosen!" yelled the giant. "Three cheers fur ther three pard's! Hip-hip hooray!" and three mighty shouts swelled into volume and echoed far among the surrounding mountains.

"Now, boys," continued Frank, "this meeting is adjourned. We—Charley, Dan and I will consult, and whatever is decided on will be our secret. Such men as we select to do our bidding will receive their instructions in person, and orders issued must be kept quiet. Not one among you will know what his neighbor is doing, for their work must be silent, swift and sure. Now scatter!"

And scatter the crowd did, while the two brothers and Dan Burton, waiting until the miners had dispersed, walked up the street together until they came to the stable where their horses stood, already saddled, and then galloped off up the road.

A short ride brought them to a snug little cottage, built on a sloping hill and facing south, and here they dismounted, giving their horses to an aged negro, who was their hostler, house-servant and cook.

Then entering the house, they seated themselves in their little parlor when each one lighted a huge pipe and proceeded to surround himself with a dense cloud of smoke.

"Well, Frank, or rather captain, as I suppose you will insist on all the titles and dignities of your new office, what is your scheme?"

"When a council of war is held," returned Frank with dignity, ignoring Dan's sarcasm, "the subordinates express their opinions and interchange ideas, and the commander-in-chief

decides on the best course to pursue. What do my subordinates suggest?"

Charley and Dan gazed at each other in amazement at this retort, and then burst out in an uncontrollable fit of laughter, in which they were quickly joined by Frank.

"I see it won't do, boys; no 'frills' for you."

"Nary frill."

"Well, let's get down to business."

"This is really a very serious matter. Men have died with their boots on in Golden Gulch, before this, but, as far as I know, this is the first cold-blooded murder that has ever been committed in the neighborhood."

"And then, the mutilation of the body; that lends additional horror to this mystery. It devolves on us to ferret out the perpetrator, and until that is done a stain will rest on all of us."

"I am willing to devote as much of time as I can spare to this end, and think I am justified in believing that you will aid me."

"You are indeed, Frank," replied his brother, while Dan chimed in with an affirmative answer.

But before Frank could add another word, a low, hoarse murmur swelled up the road, and soon a crowd came around the bend, muttering and threatening.

And in the center of the crowd was something, covered with a blanket, and lying stark and stiff on a door, carried by four miners.

CHAPTER II.

A SECOND VICTIM.

FRANK and his companions leaped to their feet and hurried to the front of the house, just as the crowd arrived, the four men who carried the door depositing it carefully on the ground.

"Well, boys," asked Frank, "what is the matter now?"

"Another murder, capt'in," replied one of the miners stepping to the front.

"Another?" cried Frank. "Who has been killed and who did the deed?"

"Thet's wot we don' know. Ther man wot wuz killed 's Jake Yerka, ther pardner of Mort Watson, ther man wot we found this mornin'. An' Jake hez been killed in percisely ther same way ez Mort."

"Two of our best miners struck down within a few hours of each other!" muttered Frank, and then turning to the crowd he asked:

"Where did you find the body?"

"Down in ther Weird Canyon, a-lyin' right alongside o' ther pool. An' his throat war cut, an' on his forehead war slashed a cross, eggzackly like Mort's."

"And there was no trace of the assassin?"

"Nary sign."

"Let me see the man!" and stepping out on the lawn, he advanced to the side of the improvised bier, and threw back the blanket from the pallid face of the corpse, which stared at him with wide-open, glassy eyes.

It was a ghastly sight that presented itself.

The gaping wound in the throat, the red slashes across the brow, the waxen features, all made up a picture not likely to be soon forgotten, and familiar as they were with scenes of bloodshed, many of the on-lookers staggered back with exclamations of horror.

Disguising his feelings as much as possible, Dan, who had accompanied Frank, raised the head of this last victim and began to examine it carefully, feeling through the matted hair with his fingers, for he thought it improbable that a stout man, such as the dead miner, could have been murdered unless first felled with a blow from behind, and then, being defenseless and insensible, had been killed.

And soon his suspicions became certainties, for at the back of the head he found a place where the skull had been crushed in, apparently by a tremendous blow from some blunt instrument, which had shattered the bone, and was in itself a death-wound.

Calling Frank's attention to this fact, he then addressed the miners:

"It is evident," said he, "that this is the work of an assassin, inspired by motives of hate, or by a desire for revenge. Whoever has done the deed has begun with our manager, Mort Watson, and followed with his assistant, Jake Yerka.

"Who will be the next victim? Judging from the way he has commenced, I should say that the murderer is taking his victims in rotation, and that the next object of his attack will be the next in rank; so I would warn the foreman—you, Amos Baldwin—that you are probably marked as the next victim, and that you had best be continually on your guard."

"Unless, indeed, having disposed of the subordinates," broke in Charley, "this unknown person next turns his attention to the principals.

I think that we three had better keep our eyes open or we may find that our turn may come next!"

"Yes; that is more than probable," added Frank. "But this second discovery discloses one fact—that we need not look for the assassin among our own numbers; for I know of no one who is absent from this assembly who belongs in Golden Gulch."

"Foreman, if you have your time-book, call over the names of your men and see if any of them are absent."

Baldwin then stepped out of the crowd and began to call over the list, each man, as his name was read, stepping out and responding, until all had answered and none were found to be absent.

"That clears the employes of the Dainty mine," continued Frank, "for, as I judge from the appearance of the body, it is not long since he was struck. Where was it found?"

"That is the peculiar part of it, sir," returned the foreman, a fine-looking, well-educated young fellow, who, having been a little wild in his youth, had gone West, and after various experiences, succeeded in obtaining his present position. "Every man you see here was gathered in the old Broadway, when I happened to look out of the door, and saw poor Yerka there, propped up against a post."

"How the body came there was a mystery, for Jake had gone down to the mine early, after his pipe, which he had forgotten last night, I having met him hardly an hour before in front of the Gold Dust Saloon."

"Boys," called Frank, when the other had finished, "you all travel in pairs, I know, and each man has his partner. Step out two at a time and let us see if any one is missing. Should any of you remember any of your friends who are not here, say so, and we will hunt them up. Come on!"

And immediately the men began to come forward in pairs, announcing their names, which Dan wrote rapidly down as they passed.

The whole population of Golden Gulch was there; miners, saloon and bar-keepers, hotel men and hostlers, gamblers and hangers-on of every description, not one was missing.

The test was complete; the mystery greater than ever.

"A sad Fourth of July," muttered Frank, as the count was finished; and then aloud:

"In addition to this holiday, men, take tomorrow. Your pay goes on as usual, and you can devote the day to burying your late comrades. We will be in town by ten o'clock in the morning, and will assist you."

"Now return, and, remember, although this suspicion does not rest any longer on one of you particularly as I am sure that neither Watson nor Yerka had an enemy in Golden Gulch, yet owe it to the dead, as well as to the living, to keep yourselves free from any taint, and also must watch that a like fate does not befall any one of your number."

And as the crowd withdrew silently, carrying their silent burden with them, he turned to Charley.

But Dan stood there for some time, lost deep though, finally shaking his head as though he was nonplussed, and turning to follow his friends; but as he glanced mechanically around he saw, on the opposite bank of a canyon which lay to the west of where he was standing, a human figure, apparently executing a wild dance, leaping high in the air, and waving arms wildly about.

Hurrying into the house he seized a powerful field-glass that hung on the wall, and rushing out on the porch, he adjusted the focus and looked in the direction of the figure.

And as he caught sight of it he uttered a cry, and called loudly to Frank and to Charley to come out.

CHAPTER III.

AN ARRIVAL.

ONE after the other, the three friends entered the room, and gazed with ever-increasing astonishment at the startling antics of the disfigured figure, which continued to leap and dance, throwing its arms above its head wildly.

Clad in rags, that barely hung together, uncovered head, bare feet and long, straggling beard and hair that were matted and unkempt, being of a dirty white, the man presented a weird picture and one that seemed out of place in this scene of majestic beauty.

"What on earth can this mean?" asked Dan, as with a final leap and a final swing of a white club it held in its hand, the figure turned and fled, bounding away with incredible swiftness, until it disappeared from view.

"More than I can say. If it were night, when witches prowl, I should think of some restless spirit from the lower regions, sent here to frighten us; but in broad daylight! I give it up."

"I think I know who it is, Frank," said Charley, quietly.

"Well, who is your friend?"

"No friend of mine; it is the hermit of the Faithful mine."

"What, that old lunatic? Not likely. He never gets himself up in that outrageous manner."

"I saw him once, while riding through the valley, or at least some one I thought was he—for no one ever got within a mile of him. He was standing on the very verge of the cliff, high above me, and was prancing around in the same way as that man just now."

"And his clothes?"

"His clothes, if such you can call them, were simply rags and he had what appeared to be a white club in his hand."

"Well, you may be right, but I should like to know what brings him to the place where we just saw him. He is a harmless old codger, and it is a wonder how he lives."

"Oh, the boys see that he doesn't suffer. There is scarcely one of them who doesn't leave food, at one time or the other, during the week, where he can find it."

"Let me see: when was he first noticed?"

"It was some time after Kid-Glove Kit left; four or five months, I think. You remember, just after the young sport went away, we had a tremendous fall of snow that stopped all operations in the canyon, and that it was the middle of April before the snow disappeared?"

"Precisely."

"Well, it was the day before we commenced work that we first heard of him. Don't you know we sent some of the boys to the Faithful mine to get the windlass to use temporarily, and that they reported seeing the figure on the cliff?"

"On, yes, and when they tried to approach him he fled."

"Exactly; and since that time only occasional glimpses have been had of him. The men took pity on him, and at last he learned that by visiting the spot where Mr. Danford's house stood, he could always obtain provisions, and since then has not suffered."

"I think I will call on him, some time," said Frank, musingly, "and try and learn something from him; and I would like to see if his condition could not be improved."

"You'd better give up that idea, Frank," laughed Charley, as the three entered the house, "for it's big odds that you won't get within a half a mile of him."

"Oh, I'll go there at night when he's asleep," said Frank, throwing himself on a lounge.

"The old duffer never sleeps, I believe."

"Then I'll chase him when awake."

"And never catch him."

"Quit your jangling, boys," interrupted Dan, "and let us see what we are going to do about discovering this mysterious assassin."

Drawing their chairs close to where Frank was lying, the three were soon earnestly discussing the situation.

For an hour or more they sat thus, viewing the late occurrences from every side, but unable to penetrate the mystery that impenetrably surrounded the two murders, when, for the second time that day, they were interrupted.

A clattering of hoofs, a cracking of whips and the rattling of wheels sounded in the distance, drew nearer and nearer, until finally the vehicle stopped in the road in front of the house, at the foot of the sloping lawn.

"That isn't the coach," said Frank, lazily, and assuming an easier position on the lounge, while he yawned vigorously. "Judging from the row the driver makes, it must be some person of importance. Probably an embassy from the Sultan of Turkey, Dan, come to make you a two-tailed pasha. Just look out and see who it is."

But as Charley, who had risen and gone to the window, caught sight of the occupant of the carriage, who was just getting out, he uttered a loud yell, and dashed out of the room, shouting:

"It is Kit, sure's you're a live man!"

And tumbled headlong out of the front door, followed, no less impetuously, by Dan and Frank, who kicked chairs and tables right and left, in their anxiety to meet and greet the new-comer."

Charley was first at the carriage, and seizing Kit's hand he nearly shook it off.

"Why, Kit, my boy, how glad I am to see you!"

"And I!"

"And I!"

And the three clustered about Kit, welcoming him warmly, and doffing their hats and bowing to Mrs. Barton, who extended her slim hands to each in turn, and seemed delighted to meet the tramp again.

"Room for you?" cried Frank, in response to a question from Kit. "The whole house is yours! Of course we have a room for you!—the whole of the second story is known as the 'Barton Flat.'"

And Mrs. Barton, accompanied by her maid, went to her rooms, while Kit followed his friends into the parlor, after sending his four-in-hand, which he had purchased in Denver, to the stables.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRUGGLE WITH A MADMAN.

It was a weird-looking figure that was seated under the spreading bough of a huge tree, near the Faithful mine—the same figure, in fact, that had attracted the attention of Dan, the day before, as it leaped and danced at the edge of the canyon.

He was tearing ravenously at some meat and bread he held in his hands, and the wolfish glare in his eyes betokened the more dangerous forms of insanity.

If it were possible that he had worn the rags he had on during the winter, it was a wonder he had not perished from the cold and exposure, for his clothes—if such a term can be applied to his dress—were so tattered and torn that it seemed a miracle that they held together; while his bare feet, bruised and scratched, and his head with no covering but his matted locks, added to the wildness of his appearance.

He was sitting on a stone that lay half-buried in the grass, while not far away was a stone house, which evidently was his home.

Down the valley some little distance could be seen the shed that covered the shaft of the Faithful mine, now abandoned on account of the absence of its owner, Craig Colton, who had, it was said in Golden Gulch, gone to Europe the year before, leaving directions with parties in New York that it should be sold.

But, although an extremely valuable property, no purchasers had appeared since the preceding fall, when a man named Worthington had come to Golden Gulch, then called simply The Gulch, with the expressed determination of buying it.

Worthington had, however, lost his life in some mysterious manner, and so the Faithful was gradually going to ruin.

The sun was shining high in the heavens and the air was intensely hot, for not a breath of wind was stirring and the heat fairly shimmered from the ground.

The man, who was still tearing at his bits of bread and meat, had his back turned to the path that led into the valley from the road, and was looking off with no expression in his eyes, which stared straight before him without apparently seeing a single object.

Against one knee rested a long, white object, which at first seemed to be a stout stick, colored white, or of a grayish color; but on closer inspection it proved to be a human thigh-bone, and was of immense length, being over twenty-two inches long!

It had evidently belonged to a giant, and to one who had not been long dead, for the bone was white and polished and not scarred and cracked as it would have been after a burial of a few months.

While he was thus looking steadily down the valley, a head appeared at the top of the path and peered cautiously at the strange creature. Seeing that he was not noticed, the spy cautiously approached—his rifle at a "ready." Stealthily he worked his way to the spot where the Mad Man-Hunter was seated at his ravenous repast, the hideous thigh-bone club scarcely released from his grasp.

When at length the man had, with exceeding caution, reached the nearest cover, he laid his rifle down, and stepping quickly forward, he spoke:

"You seem hungry, my man!"

The madman started as though stung by a serpent, and as he beheld the speaker, furiously flung bread and meat right and left, and grasping the thigh-bone swung it high in the air, and brought it down with a force that would have crushed the other's head like an egg-shell; but with no less rapid movement the new-comer sprung aside, and the murderous blow whistled harmlessly through the air.

With a snarl like a baffled beast, the madman

leaped forward to again try and crush out the life from the man before him, but his adversary was too quick for him, again.

Stooping and dodging, he avoided the swinging stroke, and slipping like an eel under the maniac's arm, he grasped him about the waist with both arms and tried to throw him to the ground; but, powerful as he was, his strength was as nothing against the mad frenzy of the lunatic.

Scratching and tearing and clutching at the interlocked hands, and bending over to try and make his foam-flecked teeth meet in his bones, he struggled and writhed and tugged until the other could resist the strain no longer, and was compelled to release him.

And as the madman broke away, he raised his deadly weapon with both of his hands and, all of his fierce frenzy gathered into one crushing blow he brought it down, trying to end the contest then and there.

But again the other's agility saved him, and falling prone to the ground, allowed the hideous club to swing over his head; then, half-rising, he struck out, straight from the shoulder.

The blow was a fair one and caught the frenzied man clean under the chin, his jaws snapping together with a crash, while he was lifted high in the air and landed a half-dozen yards off, flat on his back.

But he bounded from the turf like a rubber ball, apparently entirely unharmed by the fearful blow he had received, and evidently completely cowed and frightened, he turned and fled with a speed that defied pursuit and soon disappeared down the valley, never faltering or hesitating during the entire three-miles' run!

His antagonist, congratulating himself that he had escaped without serious injury, seated himself on the stone lately occupied by the madman, to rest, and while he waited, high up on the cliff on the east, which sprung precipitously and abruptly from the valley, he saw, plainly outlined against the blue sky, a wild figure, leaping and dancing, and at times menacing him with the white club, which glittered in the sunlight!

The figure was too far off for its voice to be heard, yet the seated man could well imagine that the maniac was hurtling fearful threats and execrations down upon him, and he shuddered to think what might have been the result, if the madman had found opportunity to use the long, cruel-looking knife thrust into the twisted rag that served as a belt.

When at last, somewhat rested, he arose, secured his rifle and walked toward the path that led to the road where he had left his horse, the madman followed him, leaping along the edge of the cliff and continuing his menaces, and when he came to a turn in the road and looked back, he could still see the figure, standing there like some baffled demon, raging and threatening, and seeming never to tire of his violent efforts.

As he walked his horse slowly along, he endeavored in vain to pierce the veil which seemed to hang over his memory and tried, without result, to remember what well-known face the passion-distorted countenance of the miner recalled; yet, although the lineaments seemed familiar, it was but a fugitive recollection, and he finally abandoned the attempt, and endeavored to dismiss the vision from his mind.

In vain! and in his dreams that night the image was always before him, the hideous face grimed and grimaced at him all through his slumber, until he started up from his wakeful couch, trembling with nervousness and unnerved with indefinable apprehensions. For a thousand times was his late encounter re-enacted, and his troubled brain refused to remain quiet an instant.

CHAPTER V.

THE HERALD "PERSONAL."

THE "Fresh Clam," gin-mill and fifteenth class restaurant, on the Harlem river, was doing no business to speak of during the latter part of the month of June, 1884, and the proprietor of the place, known to his regular customers as Ted, seemed to have plenty of leisure.

He had been left in charge of the saloon by its former proprietor, James Jordan, when the latter had accompanied Mr. Craig Colton to Colorado, and as the former had never reappeared, he had appropriated the profits to his own use. These profits were not anything very great, but were sufficient to support him comfortably and to enable him to keep his place well stocked with all that he required to carry on a satisfactory business.

On the day in question he was lolling back

his comfortable seat behind the counter reading a well-thumbed novel and yawning from time to time as if he decidedly needed sleep.

At length he flung his book to one side and rose, saying:

"I believe I'll shut up ther shop, an' go down ter ther island."

"But I'll jest take a look at ther Hur'ld, an' see if any hairess is a-lookin' fur a young an' hansum husband."

"Snorkey Bill, he married a hairess, an' she owned two pigs an' a goat up ter Yonkers an' he is now livin' in lugsury an' ease."

"A nenterprisin' young man like me hadn't orter ter hev ter work, an' struggle an' toil fur his daily bread."

"Where is that Hurld? Oh, here!"

And picking up the paper, which looked as though it had formed the base of a particularly greasy soup so stained and marked was it, he began to look over the "Personal" column.

Nothing of importance attracted his attention until he had gotten nearly to the bottom of the notices when suddenly he started, and looking again, read the following.

"To any one able and willing to give information regarding the movements of Craig Colton, also known by various aliases, a liberal reward will be paid. Apply to C. B., room 29, Hotel Balmoral, city."

"Ph-e-e-w!" whistled the boy, as he again read the notice. "Here's a chance! Craig Colton's wanted, is he? Well, I'm jest ther huckleberry as can give ther information; so I'll jest tog up a little, shut up ther shop, an' give Mister 'C. B.' a call. Don' know where ther Hotel Balmoral is, but I kin git a D'reckt'ry somewhere an' find out."

And locking the front door, he went up-stairs to a back room, where, hanging against the wall were numerous suits of clothes, which he examined carefully.

Selecting a light gray suit, which fitted him admirably, and putting on a Derby hat, after washing his face and hands, combing his hair and changing his collar and cuffs, he presented a totally different appearance, and in no manner resembled the somewhat disreputable lad who ran the "Fresh Clam."

He was an intelligent, shrewd-looking young fellow, and with his dress changed his manner, deportment and language, so that he could easily be mistaken for a well-to-do boy, who was engaged in some respectable business.

Leaving the saloon, he walked over to Third avenue, and entered the nearest drug store, where obtaining permission to consult the book, he soon located the hotel he was looking for, finding it in the Directory without any difficulty.

Then taking the "L," he rode down-town to Twenty-third street and there leaving the train, struck across town, and soon reached his destination, entering without hesitation.

Addressing the clerk he said politely:

"I have called, sir, in reference to this notice," and he pointed to the personal in a *Herald* he had bought just before entering.

The clerk glanced at the paper and then at Ted, and, apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, called a bell-boy, and directed him to show the visitor to room 29.

In answer to his knock, a voice cried "Come in," and opening, he entered the room, which was furnished as a parlor.

Seated in an easy-chair by the window was a gentleman who was so pale, so thin, that it was evident that he was just recovering from a serious illness, and who was yet very weak.

Motioning to Ted to take a chair, he waited until the bell-boy had closed the door, and then, noticing the paper that Ted still held in his hand, a look of comprehension darted over his face, and leaning eagerly forward he asked:

"Do you come here on account of a personal in that paper?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you know this man, Colton?"

"Very well, sir, having seen him many times, both as himself and disguised as some one else."

"And do you know where he is now?"

"I am not sure about that; but I do know where he went when he left New York a few months ago."

"Where did he go?"

"To Colorado."

"Alone?"

"No, sir; a man named Jordan went with him, at least as far as Chicago; whether he went beyond that I cannot say."

"Jordan, Jordan," muttered the other, as if trying to recall the man bearing that name, but without success. "I do not know him."

"But never mind; tell me something more regarding Colton."

"Did he go disguised, or was he himself?"

"I'll tell you all about it, sir, which will be the shortest way of getting at the matter."

"Four or five months ago, Craig Colton, coming to the place where I was working, disguised himself and then having given directions to Jordan, went to the Windsor Hotel and called on a Mr. Barton, who was staying there with his wife."

"Barton?" interrupted the other.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see him?"

"Not then, sir. I waited for Colton while he went up-stairs to Mr. Barton's rooms, and what happened there I cannot say; but that evening Colton, who was called Mr. Worthington by his friends—I went to the depot and watched them—Jordan and a gentleman and lady took the train for Chicago, the two strangers being young, he maybe twenty-five, his wife, who looked almost exactly like him, being eighteen or nineteen.

"Since that time I have heard nothing of them."

"Nor of Jordan?"

"No, sir. He was disguised as a preacher and acted the part so well that if I had not known him intimately, I should never have recognized him in the world."

Changing the subject somewhat hurriedly, the invalid asked Ted if he had plenty of time to spare, and receiving an affirmative answer, requested the boy to ring the bell.

When the summons was answered, he handed a note he had scribbled to the servant, and asked him to have it sent by messenger immediately, and then requested Ted to wait until he received an answer, to which the boy, his curiosity now thoroughly aroused, gladly agreed.

CHAPTER VI.

A. FOX, DETECTIVE.

THE little clock on the mantle ticked on, the invalid, leaning back in his chair, and buried in deep thought, soon fell asleep, while Ted, patiently awaiting the end, sat motionless for an hour or more, when suddenly the sleeper awakened, and as quietly as if pursuing the same train of thought that had occupied his mind when he had fallen asleep, turned to Kit, and asked:

"What have you got against this man?"

"Against Colton, do you mean?"

"Yes. There must be some reason for your being willing to betray him."

"I do not see how the word 'betray' can apply to this case. We are not accomplices in any sense of the word, and I am under no oath to him or to any one else to keep his movements secret."

"Then you are after the reward."

"I do not know of any reason that causes you to talk to me that way, and if this is all you have to say I may as well be going."

And Ted arose, took his hat from the table, and started for the door.

"Hold on, my boy," cried the other; "I was only trying you. But tell me, if you will not feel hurt at the question, what makes you so bitter against Colton?"

"He bullied and struck me, and I have, ever since that time, been waiting for an opportunity to get even with him."

"But if he had robbed you, stabbed you, tried to murder you?"

"Then, as soon as I was able, I would trail him to the end of creation and hunt him down, even if it took a lifetime!"

"He did all that to me!"

"To you?"

"To me. Under the guise of friendship he came to see me at my office, and there tried to murder me, and thinking that he had succeeded, robbed me of certain valuables."

"I am not free from blame, as I had engaged in a conspiracy with him to rob a defenseless old man and his daughter, but I have repented it bitterly, and believe my punishment was just."

"For months I hovered between life and death, and am even now scarcely convalescent, but am rapidly recovering."

"I tell you this frankly, in proof of how I regret having spoken to you as I did a few moments ago."

"Are you satisfied with the apology?"

"More than satisfied, sir."

"Well, then, let us be friends. Your grievance against this man is, compared to mine, as a puff of air from the nozzle of a bellows to the howling hurricane!"

"But it is a grievance, an insult—and together we will track him, together we will find him, and when you have wiped out your insult, I

will so avenge the wrong that he has done me, that it were better that he had never been born!"

And exhausted by his frenzy, he fell back against his cushions, gasping for breath, his eyes glaring with the latent fury that was consuming his life.

But as Ted, alarmed, hurried to his side, offering him a glass of the cooling drink that stood on a table near at hand, the invalid waved him aside, saying:

"I am foolish to thus give way to my temper, but when I think of his craven act, of the torture I have suffered, I lose all control of myself."

"But you can come with me?"

"There is nothing here to keep me."

"Then consider it settled. I believe that I can trust you, although I have no proof that you are not an emissary of Colton's, and you will not object if I request that you do not leave my rooms, or endeavor to consult with any one alone, until we leave New York?"

"Certainly not, sir, for I can readily understand your doubts."

"But I must ask you to send for some things I have at home."

"I expect a man here, every moment, who will attend to everything; he is a detective, and I shall ask him to accompany us to Colorado."

"We will go to Chicago, first, and see if we can discover any trace of Colton there."

"I can stay here then until you are ready to start for the West?"

"Certainly. I have three bedrooms, one of which you can occupy."

"When Mr. Fox comes, you can tell him your story, while I rest, for I am a little tired and must lie down for a time."

"Can I help you, sir?"

"Yes, thank you. Let me lean on your shoulder, and help me off with my coat; my wound still pains me somewhat, and I can hardly wait on myself yet."

And Ted, carefully assisting him, walked into the next room, where the wounded man laid down, being made comfortable by the boy, and then, thanking him again said:

"I can depend on you, then? You will not leave the hotel?"

"Not until you give me permission."

"Then close the door and wait in the sitting-room until Mr. Fox comes, and call me in an hour."

Ted had been seated in the adjoining room but a short time, when there came a discreet tap on the door, and in answer to the response, the handle was gently turned, the door quietly opened and a man slid into the room so softly that he made no sound.

That he was the expected detective, Ted had no doubt, for his every movement was furtive and his glance quick and distrustful, as if he knew in every one he met, a possible criminal upon whose wrists he would take the greatest pleasure in slipping the darbies.

Glancing around and seeing that the room was untenantanted save by the lad, he walked stealthily across the room, and whispered:

"Where is Mr. B.?"

"If you mean the sick gentleman, he has gone into the other room to take a nap, and left me here to meet you; for you are, I suppose, Mr. Fox."

"A. Fox, private detective. All investigations secretly made. Antecedents, habits and associates ascertained; thefts, fraud and all classes of confidential business transacted in any section," rattled off the other, as fluently as if he had been reading from a card.

"Exactly, I am instructed to tell you what I know of Mr. Colton. You know him I suppose?"

"Know him! Do I?" and seating himself on the very edge of a chair he looked as wise as an owl, and winked and blinked at Ted as if to ask:

"Is there anything I don't know?"

"Well, then, I will tell you what I know about him," continued Ted, wondering all the time where the invalid had picked up this man, who looked and acted like a fool.

When he had finished what he had to say, the detective, who had apparently been thinking how long this was going to last and did not seem to be paying any attention to what Ted was saying, suddenly turned to him.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"In Harlem."

"Just so; at the Fresh Clam."

"How do you know that?"

Without replying, Mr. Fox laid his finger along the side of his nose, and winked slowly and solemnly, while Ted began to think that maybe he was not such a fool as he looked.

CHAPTER VII.

A DISGUISE.

"So Mr. B. intends going to Chicago as soon as he is able to travel, does he, and then on to Colorado, if it is necessary?"

"So he said."

"Well, he'll be able to leave in a week, from what his doctor told me."

"He doesn't look very strong."

"No; but the trip will do him good. What time are you going to waken him?"

"In about half an hour."

"I'll be back by that time. You will wait here?"

"I told him that I would not leave the house until he gave me permission."

"Very good; I'll be back in twenty minutes or less," and the detective, gliding from the room, closed the door carefully after him, leaving Ted convinced that there was more in the man than appeared at first glance.

Fifteen minutes had scarcely elapsed when there came another tap at the door, and Ted, opening it, saw standing before him, a portly gentleman, dressed in black broadcloth, with snowy-white vest, silk hat and immense fob dangling from his watch-pocket.

He carried a gold-headed cane and wore a short, full beard, that was almost as white as his linen, and from his whole person exhaled the name "Doctor."

Saluting Ted gravely, he walked in, removing his hat as he did so, and then in a rich, oily voice, asked after his patient.

"Lying down, is he?" he said, in answer to Ted's explanation; "then, my lad, I will not disturb him, but will write a prescription to be given him when he awakens, and you can take it to the nearest drug-store."

"You will have to excuse me, doctor. I promised Mr.—Mr.—I don't know his name, but I mean the sick gentleman, that I would not leave the house without his permission."

"But this is an errand for him," persisted the physician.

"Well, if he requests me to go, I will do so gladly; otherwise no," returned Ted, firmly.

"Well then, run down-stairs and tell them to send me a messenger."

"I cannot leave the room, sir; I have promised."

"This is too much," stuttered the doctor, growing purple in the face with rage; "you are disrespectful, and—and I'll cane you severely and teach you a lesson."

"Your caning will do no good, sir, for you cannot make me change my mind."

"You must be unusually faithful."

"When I say anything, sir, I always mean it."

"Well said, my lad, well said. I only wish there were more like you here in this city; but what is your name?"

"Ted, sir, they all call me."

"Humph! Short for Edward, I suppose. But Edward what?"

"I have never known any other name."

"But your parents?"

"I never knew them."

"But you are educated; can read, write?"

"Oh! yes, sir; but I owe that to the teachers in the orphan asylum where I was brought up."

"And they taught you to speak the truth?"

"Always, sir."

"Then, Teddy, my lad, I believe you will always succeed, and that you will be faithful to Mr. Bentley, as the gentleman in there is named."

The voice had changed completely and a different expression appeared on the face of the doctor, who, removing his wig and beard, disclosed to Ted's astonished gaze the features of A. Fox, detective and confidential agent.

Laughing at the lad's puzzled expression, Mr. Fox explained:

"Mr. Bentley wrote me to come prepared for a journey, and when I noticed that you were inclined to criticise me, and being anxious to put your fidelity to the test, I hurried down-stairs where I had left my satchel, secured a room, and jumped into these clothes."

"It is best, young man, never to draw conclusions from first appearances."

And of this Ted was now thoroughly convinced, for he saw how quickly the detective had read his thoughts and had deceived him by his perfect disguise, while he realized what a valuable auxiliary this man would be when it came to tracing Colton.

Completely trapped, he had nothing left to do but to acknowledge it and to ask Mr. Fox to forgive him, which apology the good-natured detective pooh-poohed aside, shaking hands with him heartily, and telling him that he was not

the first person his assumed manner had deceived, and would not be the last.

And the hour now being passed Ted rapped on Mr. Bentley's door and being told to enter went in and assisted that gentleman to rise and dress.

"That everything may be considered satisfactory, you can, if you will, assume the part of my servant while we are traveling; so that no suspicions may be aroused, said Mr. Bentley.

"I shall always call you Henry, and, of course shall expect no menial duties from you."

"Oh, I will do anything to make myself useful sir," replied Ted, gladly, for he had taken a great fancy to this fine-mannered gentleman, who had suffered, and was still suffering so much from his wound.

"Then that is settled. Ah, Fox, glad to see you," he continued as he entered the sitting-room. "Has our young friend here told you what he knows regarding Colton?"

"Yes, sir, and I believe him thoroughly."

"How is that? You are generally inclined to be suspicious."

"But I put Ted here to the test and found him everything that was faithful."

"Yes?"

"Yes, sir." And Fox told Mr. Bentley how he had tested the boy, and how the latter had refused to leave the hotel or even the room.

"Thank you, my boy," said Bentley, as the detective concluded, "but it is only what I expected from you."

"But, Fox," he added, turning to the other as he seated himself in his easy-chair, "Ted is hereafter to be known as Henry, and a slight disguise will not hurt him."

"All right, sir, I'll attend to that."

"And now, if you will excuse me, I will go down-stairs and write a few letters, for I suppose that we will soon go away and will not return for some time."

"Not until we know something definite concerning Colton. But of course I will excuse you. Will I see you again this evening?"

"I will drop in about eight. My room is number 12, if you should want to see me and my name is—Watson."

"Very well, Mr. Watson; but will you not dine with us?"

"Not this evening, thank you, sir."

"But when do you think of leaving for Chicago and the West?"

"Not before Monday. I will let you know in ample time."

"Thank you, sir! Good-afternoon."

"Good-afternoon," and the detective withdrew, leaving Bentley and Ted alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DINNER-PARTY.

THEY conversed for some time on different topics, Bentley telling Ted that for a long time after receiving his wound he had hovered between life and death, finally, owing to an excellent constitution and careful treatment, pulling through but unable for many weeks to leave his bed.

But now he was much better and his doctor advised him to travel and thought that a change of scene would be of inestimable benefit to him.

So he had decided to go West, even before he had seen Ted, and only that morning had thought of putting an advertisement in the paper, in the faint hope that some one might see it who knew of Colton's whereabouts.

But he felt the effects of his excitement of the afternoon, and decided to retire early, it being of the first importance that he should regain his strength as rapidly as possible.

"But you, my boy," need not remain in-doors if you do not want to, for I have the utmost confidence in you, and do not for a moment believe that you would desert or betray me.

"Would you not like to go to one of the theaters, or out for a walk?"

"I prefer to remain here, sir, for you might need something, and I am sure that I could be of more service to you than any of the servants about the house."

"Well, then, if you really do not care to go out, I will be very glad to know that you are near."

"But you must have some dinner."

"Thank you, sir, I believe I would like something to eat, for I am getting very hungry."

"Then ring the bell and order what you want, to be served here."

"And you, sir, will you not eat something?"

"Nothing at all. I cannot eat anything after noon, for it interferes with my rest, so, for today at least, you will have to dine alone."

"Mind! order exactly what you want. Ring

the bell now, and then please help me to my room.

"You will find books, papers, magazines, in abundance over there on the table, and when you are sleepy, go into that room and you will find a nice bed."

"Sleep as late as you want to, and if you are up at nine, rap on my door. If I need anything I will manage to make myself heard."

"If you will let me, sir, I will arrange something by which you can call me."

"But how?"

"I will fasten a string to my pillow, and the other end to the head of your bed, and if anything is needed, all that you will have to do will be to pull the cord and I will be awakened."

"A very good idea, my boy, and very simply managed. When I am fixed you can make your arrangements."

So Ted—or Henry, as he may now be called—aided Mr. Bentley to disrobe and to get to bed, and then returning to the sitting-room rang the bell for the boy.

When he came, Ted requested him to send a waiter up, and to bring a ball of stout twine that he might arrange the signal-cord, and in a few moments both arrived, and having ordered a nice dinner, he fixed the cord by passing it through the key-hole of Bentley's door, fastening the end to the head of the bed, and leaving the ball of twine lying on the floor of the sitting-room for the present.

In a short time his dinner arrived, being brought up by a negro who, Henry thought, was the blackest man he had ever seen; but he said nothing, and soon the table was spread, and with a napkin over his arm, the negro waited.

Henry, ravenously hungry, seated himself, and the cover of the soup-tureen being lifted off with a flourish, he helped himself.

But he found that it was a little dark, and asked the negro to light the gas, when, much to his astonishment the man answered him:

"White folks is mighty pertick'ler 'bout how they eats. Us yo' niggers don't make no such fuss 'bout light."

But he lit the gas nevertheless, and then took up his station behind Henry's chair.

"Why don't you close the blinds and draw down the windows from the top? You can't have been long in the hotel business."

"Feard o' havin' folks see how much yer eat, ain't yer?"

In amazement the lad dropped his spoon and looked at the negro, who, however, paid no attention to him, but walked off to the windows and did as Henry had suggested.

The boy, marveling what such conduct might mean, thought seriously of ringing and sending a complaint to the office, but the fear of disturbing Mr. Bentley deterred him, so he refrained, and began his dinner.

But the soup was tasteless, and turning to the waiter, he said:

"Give me the salt"—for there was none on the table, and he thought that the negro had left it on the tray with the rest of the dinner.

"What fur?" grumbled the negro. Restraining himself with an effort, he replied:

"For my soup, of course."

"Soup's done been salted."

"That is possible but I wish more; do as I tell you instantly!"

But the negro, instead of obeying, leaned over his shoulder, coolly took the spoon from the plate, and lifting it to his lips, tasted the soup!

This was too much, and Henry, forgetting all else but the insult, leaped to his feet and grasped his chair to swing it high aloft and dash the negro to the floor.

But the latter jumped back and raising his hand, snatched off the woolly wig that covered his head and in a mocking voice cried:

"A. Fox, detective, etc., etc.," while he laughed long but silently.

To say that Henry was amazed would but feebly express his feelings, for he had not had the slightest idea that the negro was anything but what he appeared to be and recognizing the voice of the detective, felt like punching himself to see if he was awake or dreaming.

But the detective came forward saying:

"I know you are a pretty shrewd sort of a lad, Ted, my boy, and I wanted to try a new disguise which I have never before worn and which, now that it has proven a good one, will assume with confidence whenever it may be necessary."

"I know the proprietor of the hotel well, and had no difficulty in obtaining permission to bring you your dinner."

"But now that it is brought, what do you say to our carrying the table into the next room, so

The Mad Man-Hunter.

as not to disturb Mr. Bentley, when, after I have washed up a little, we will dine together."

"With much pleasure," and these arrangements having been completed, the two sat down and ate a hearty meal, Fox having been careful to provide enough for both, and entertaining Henry with a hundred stories of his detective experiences.

And when the meal was finished and Fox had smoked his cigar, it was growing late, so, setting the tray outside the door, he bade the boy good-night and left the room.

And, Henry, having arranged the cord by drawing it tight and fastening it to his pillow, leaving his door open, undressed, put out the light and jumped into bed, where he was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

A DANGEROUS LEAP.

THE boy slept on for some time, undisturbed, when suddenly there came a sensation as if his head was dropping off of his shoulders, and in an instant he was wide awake, trying to realize what had happened.

In a moment he recalled the cord leading to his pillow from Mr. Bentley's room, and leaping to the floor he hurried into the sitting-room, where he had left one of the gas-jets burning low and then to the door of Bentley's sleeping-room.

He noticed that the room seemed intensely hot and that there was a slight smell of something burning in the air, but not stopping to think what it might mean he opened the door, and then, as a cloud of smoke swept into his face and nearly choked him, he staggered back.

Half-strangled as he was, and nearly blinded by the thick vapor, he recovered himself, however, in a moment, and dashed into the room, groping his way to the bed, and, as tenderly and as gently as he could, lifted the inanimate body in his arms, and slowly made his way back to the sitting-room, his lungs nearly bursting with the pressure, and closed the door behind him.

In a moment more he had deposited his burden on the easy-chair by the window, and had thrown the blinds wide open, letting the fresh air pour in, and then rushed to the door leading into the hall, unlocked and opened it, and looked out.

A fearful sight greeted his gaze!

The whole building, save the corner in which was situated their rooms, seemed a mass of flame and the yellow tongues leaped high in the hall and hungrily licked the ceiling above.

A crowd had gathered in the street, and engine after engine was arriving, the whole street being as light as day in the lurid glare that glowed from fifty windows.

Seeing that all escape was cut off though the hall and stairway being on fire, Henry hurried back to the window and leaning far over the sill, looked out, and seeing him, the people below sent up a shout of encouragement and urged the firemen to hurry and raise their ladders.

But this, owing to a network of telegraph wires that stretched just below the window they were unable to do, and it seemed as if the two must perish before the eyes of the assembled multitude below, and who were powerless to aid them.

The boy was in a desperate strait, but his coolness did not desert him an instant, and turning, he glanced hastily around in search of something that would be of service.

Suddenly he leaped across the room and seized the ball of cord that lay on the table, hurried back to the window and unwinding the twine held one end and tossed the other to the ground.

In a moment the cord was seized below and fastened to a stout rope, which Henry drew up carefully, taking the end into his room and attaching it to the leg of his bed.

And then he fastened the other end of the rope about the body of the yet insensible man, raised him carefully to the window and lowered him gently to the ground just as a burst of flame leaped from the window below which burned the rope in two in a twinkling leaving the lad without any means of escape.

And by this time the fire had eaten through the door that led into the sitting-room from Bentley's sleeping apartment and the heat and smoke were becoming unbearable as the yellow tongues licked their way slowly but steadily toward him.

Better instant death, he thought, than the lingering torture that must follow should he remain where he was, so standing on the sill, he looked down to the pavement below, while the crowd hushed its tumult and awaited the

tragedy which it seemed, must surely follow in a few moments.

And some of the men of the insurance patrol, hurriedly taking a tarpaulin from their wagon, stationed themselves beneath the window and stretching the tarpaulin tight, shouted to him to leap into it.

But the roar of the flames prevented his hearing the calls and drowned all the voices, while the dense clouds of smoke that rolled from below obstructed the view and did not admit of his seeing the precautions that had been taken for his safety.

And with an intuition that seemed marvelous, he rushed to his room, tore a thick comfort from the foot of the bed, where it lay folded, ready for use should the weather turn suddenly cold, hurried back to the window and flung the covering far out on to the wires, where it spread out and lay hanging.

And then, stepping back to the center of the room, he leaped forward onto the window-sill, stooping as he did so, and hurled himself out, lighting on the comfort and lying there, for the present in safety, the net-work of telegraph wires supporting him without breaking.

And there he hung, suspended, the thick comfort preventing the wires cutting him, while a loud cry of admiration arose from the crowd below at this feat of daring.

And then, slowly and cautiously, he worked his way along the wires until he reached the post, and there, grasping the cross-pieces, swung himself down and slid to the ground in safety, just as the flames burst from the window whence he had leaped.

A dozen hands grasped him as he reached the street and a thousand voices greeted his heroic feat, but, after thanking them for their kindness the lad asked the men who surrounded him where Mr. Bentley had been carried to and if he was safe.

"Safe and sound, my boy!" cried a well-known voice, as Fox, the detective, elbowed his way to where he was standing and grasping his hand with a grip that made it crack, congratulated him warmly.

"Mr. Bentley is in the next street, has recovered consciousness and been told how he was saved. He is very anxious to see you and wants you to come around at once."

So the boy, looking once more at the burning building which had so nearly been his funeral pile, followed his friend, the crowd parting right and left to let him pass, and greeting him with hundreds of complimentary remarks, to which he replied not a word, simply lifting his hat from time to time as a louder cheer than usual broke from the admiring throng.

In a few moments they reached the house to which Bentley had been taken, and found him installed in a large bed-room on the second floor, where everything possible had been done to make him comfortable, and at sight of Henry, he half-raised himself, and extending both hands, cried:

"My boy, you have saved my life, and henceforth you are my brother!"

CHAPTER X. A TERRIBLE SHOCK.

IT was the day after the burial of the murdered miners when, at their cottage, Frank and Charley Francis, Dan Burton and Kit were seated on the porch, talking over past events.

Kit, on his return, the previous evening, had told his friends of his adventure with the maniac and now the conversation had reverted to that subject.

"Have you any idea who this man is?" he asked Frank.

"Not the slightest," returned the other. "Where he came from and when, no one seems to be able to say. His favorite haunt seems to be the neighborhood of the Faithful mine, and he is rarely seen elsewhere."

"I think," said Kit, musingly, "that I have seen that face before, and wish that I could get a good chance to examine him closely; but yesterday afternoon he kept me so busy that it was all I could do to avoid his attack."

"What a desperate insanity seems to have taken possession of him!"

"I should think so!" broke in Dan. "Judging from the war-dance he executed on the cliff yonder, when I looked at him through the glass, he is about as crazy as they make 'em."

"Frank," interrupted Kit, earnestly, not heeding Dan's remark, "has it struck you that this madman may be at the bottom of these mysterious murders that have so startled Golden Gulch?"

"By heavens, Kit!" exclaimed Frank, starting up, "I believe that you are right, although the idea had not occurred to me before. Judg-

ing from his fierce attack on you and his wild actions, I should not be surprised to discover that he is the murderer, for everything points in that direction; the blow on the head, the brutal slash across the throat, the gash on the forehead—all seem to be the work of a raving maniac; surely no sane man would do so horrible a deed!"

"Suppose, boys," said Charley, who had been an attentive listener to these remarks, "that we four ride over to the Faithful mine and capture this man."

"If it be true that he has committed these crimes, he should be placed in safe keeping, and if he be innocent, then it would be charity to place him in confinement, where he could be well taken care of and possibly cured."

"A good suggestion, Charley," acquiesced Kit, "and we will act upon it at once. There will be no danger in leaving Dainty here alone, I suppose?"

"Not the slightest. Old Pete is about, and is as brave as he is faithful; you can depend on it that no harm will come to 'young Missy' as he calls her while he is here."

"Well, then in that case we might as well start at once; I'll join you in a moment," and stepping into the hall, he called to his wife who came down-stairs, when he told her of his intention and asked her not to leave the house until he returned, which would be in two or three hours.

Rejoining his friends, they mounted, the horses having been brought around by Pete, and rode away, Kit calling back to the old negro:

"Don't let anything happen to Mrs. Barton, Pete."

"Oh, no, sah," answered the man, grinning and showing his white teeth. "I'll look after her."

The four friends rode on through the town, Kit stopping a hundred times to shake hands with his numerous friends, on past the ruins of Dainty's former home, until they came to the path at the side of the road, up which their horses scrambled until they neared the valley, when Kit called a halt.

"We will ride on slowly, boys, until we get to the top of the slope and then we will gallop down the valley at full speed, so as to overtake the madman before he can reach the rocks; for once there he will defy pursuit, and he runs like the wind."

So they proceeded cautiously until they neared the top of the slope, when they spurred their horses and dashed into the valley at full speed, thundered up to the stone house and took up their stations around it, so that no one, who might be inside, could escape.

They sat there for a few moments, awaiting developments; but as nothing happened, Frank, dismounting, walked to the door and, finding it unfastened, opened it and walked inside, being on his guard that he might not be taken by surprise.

But, having searched the house thoroughly, he was unable to find any trace of the missing man, so rejoined his companions and reported.

Look as they would up and down the valley, they could see no one, although they rode in every direction and consumed an hour or more in the hunt.

At length, convinced that the man they were looking for was not in the vicinity, they turned their horses' heads homeward and rode slowly along, agreeing to come back that night and the next day, and the next, if necessary, until they had captured the maniac.

When they reached Golden Gulch they stopped a short time to see some of the men about the town and ask if anything had been seen by any of them, of the lunatic; but could learn nothing so rode away toward the cottage, which they shortly reached.

As they approached, Kit expected to see his wife on the porch or at one of the windows, waiting to greet him, but no one appeared and the house seemed silent and deserted, but thinking that she was up-stairs he did not worry about the matter, following his friends to the stable to put up his horse, while Frank exclaimed:

"I wonder where that lazy nigger is? Asleep in the hay-loft, probably, with his mouth wide open, catching flies."

"If I catch him he will catch something else, I'll warrant!"

And as he ceased speaking he opened the stable door and walked in, but instantly started back with a cry of terror, calling to the others:

"Good heavens, boys, look at this!"

And as his friends hurried in, they, too, started back in horror and vented their rage in ejaculations loud and deep, for lying on the

floor, was the body of old Pete, stretched on its back, the head lying on one side and the face turned toward the door so that the light fell upon it, showing only too plainly the red marks where the knife had slashed the fatal cross and the deep gash in the throat.

With skull crushed in, the faithful old negro had met his death in precisely the same manner that the two miners had encountered theirs, and there was no room for doubt that the same hand had wrought the three deeds.

One glance was enough for Kit, and he turned and dashed toward the house, calling to his wife and hoping, almost against hope, that she would hear and answer him.

But nothing but the echoes replied, and leaping up the stairs, he hurried to her sitting-room, trusting to find her there; but the room was untenanted save by a motionless figure lying in one corner, which he recognized as that of Dainty's maid.

He endeavored to arouse her, lifting her head, his blood chilling at the thought of what he might see, but with a gladness beyond words, he found that she was not harmed, but had fainted from fright probably, and was now completely insensible and oblivious to all her surroundings.

So, calling his friends, he set about resuscitating her, that he might, if she could furnish it, obtain a clew to this terrible mystery.

CHAPTER XI.

A CLEW.

THE Monday following Bentley's and the lad's narrow escape from the burning hotel, the injured man was not well enough to leave the city and, by his doctor's orders, deferred his departure until the next week.

But at that time he was so far recovered that he felt perfectly able to travel, so that the three, Bentley, Detective Fox and Henry took the express for Chicago, leaving Jersey City at nine o'clock in the morning, and reaching their destination on Tuesday, and going direct to the hotel, where they secured rooms, Bentley lying down immediately, being attended by Henry, while the indefatigable Mr. Fox, once more in his element, now that he was "on the trail," started out to see if he could obtain any news of Kit and Craig Colton.

And in his search he was unusually successful, for going to the hotel where Kit and his wife had stopped during their stay in Chicago, he introduced himself to the clerk, who immediately placed the register at his disposal; but as he handed it to him asked him what parties he was looking for.

"I, of course, do not know where these persons stopped during their visit here, and must visit all of the hotels in succession, trusting much to luck to find them."

"I am looking"—consulting his note-book—"for a Mr. Christopher Barton and wife, Mr.—"

"Hold on!" interrupted the clerk, "I can help you. The parties you refer to were here some months ago; I recall them perfectly."

"Mr. Barton, while in the city, had a very narrow escape from being killed or drowned, through his horse running away, or rather the horse harnessed to the *coupe* in which he was being driven at the time."

"He was here—Let me see. Jim!" calling to the cashier, "when was it that Mr. Barton had the narrow escape at the Madison street bridge?"

"Last winter, or fall, I think. Look back to November, and on through."

"Thanks." And then turning to the detective, he continued:

"If you will step inside and take a chair, I will get you the register for that time, and you can look them up for yourself. I am so busy that I must ask you to excuse me."

Thanking the clerk for his offer, Fox stepped inside, and turning the leaves of the register over slowly, suddenly found these names:

"CHRISTOPHER BARTON AND WIFE, Colorado."

"EDWARD WORTHINGTON, New York."

"REV. MR. ELKHART, New York."

"So," exclaimed the detective, with intense satisfaction, "I have you so far! And now to see how long they remained here, and where they went when they left this house."

"But who can the Reverend Mr. Elkhart be? I must ask the boy about that; but it must be Jim Jordan, for he has disappeared from his usual haunts; and come to think of it, the boy did say that he had come West with the others, and probably had disguised himself as a minister."

"Well," interrupted the clerk, who had found a moment's leisure, "do you find what you want to know?"

"Yes. Here are the three names that I was in search of; but that is not all.

"Can you tell me where they went, and how long they remained in the house?"

"They were only here a day or two, and then went to Colorado, where Mr. Barton has, I understand, large interests."

"And the other two gentlemen?"

"They went West, also, Mr.—I forget his name—yes, Worthington, having told me that he thought of buying property out there, and asking the preacher, in my hearing, to go with him."

"And he consented?"

"Yes, and they all went together."

"Well, sir, I am very much obliged to you."

"Not at all. Anything else I can do for you?"

"Nothing, thanks. When I come back this way I may have something to tell you that will prove decidedly startling."

"If I am not very much mistaken, that 'accident' you speak of was but the first act of a drama which may have become a tragedy by this time."

"Is it possible?"

"More than possible; it is probable. But again, many thanks, and good-morning."

"Good-morning. Don't fail to drop in if you come back this way, and let me hear your story, for I am decidedly interested."

"Don't fear; I'll drop in on you when you least expect it." And leaving the office, Mr. Fox walked jauntily out of the hotel, his hat tipped over a little more toward the side of his head than usual.

Reaching his hotel shortly after, he went straight to Mr. Bentley's room and found that gentleman sitting up and looking much better than when he first saw him ten days before.

The table in the center of the room was laid for three and as Fox entered Bentley called out:

"Just in time! We are about to have a little lunch, and you are invited to join us."

"I am surprised, sir," said the detective, with assumed dignity, "to see that you would so demean yourself as to eat at the same table with your body-servant."

"Body-servant!" exclaimed Bentley, surprised, and then, as the detective waved his hand toward the lad who did not exactly understand he laughed and added:

"Oh, I understand; but Henry has been promoted; he is no longer my body-servant."

"Indeed! And what position does he occupy now, may I ask?"

"He is my adopted brother."

"Ah, then, Mr. Bentley, junior, allow me to congratulate you upon your rise in life. Now that this matter is settled, I can no longer decline your kind invitation, Mr. Bentley, senior, and will accept with pleasure."

"Well, then, sit down, and stop your nonsense, if you can. But it strikes me that you are in unusually high spirits; what has happened? Have you discovered anything?"

"I have learned," replied Mr. Fox as well as he was able, his mouth being full of some excellent chicken salad at the moment, "that Messrs. Barton, Worthington and Elkhart—the latter being a D. D., Doctor of Divinity you know, were in Chicago last fall."

"Barton and Worthington we can identify; but who in the world is Mr. Elkhart?"

"His name in private life I believe to be James Jordan."

"And who is James Jordan?"

"Ted can tell you."

And in a few words the lad explained the relation Jordan had borne to him, and added that he had come West with Colton.

"Then so far we are right, and this is only another proof, if we needed it, that Henry here—and you, Mr. Fox must call him Henry hereafter, not Ted—has told us the truth."

"And I believe," continued the detective, "that those two men, Colton and Jordan, accompanied Mr. Barton on his journey, with the intention of murdering him and his young wife at the first favorable opportunity."

"And I only hope that we have not started out on their trail too late."

"And so do I, most fervently," added Bentley, "for I was once Colton's accomplice, and feel that I would be partly responsible if anything happened to those two."

"To-night we will start for Denver, and thence go to The Gulch; for, if Colton is in Colorado, we will find him in that town."

CHAPTER XII.

AN ARRIVAL.

AFTER half an hour's work, the four friends succeeded in restoring the fainting girl to consciousness, when scarce had she opened her eyes

and looked about, than memory seemed to return to her all at once and with a scream she fainted dead away again.

Not ceasing his efforts to bring her back to sensibility, Kit said to his friends:

"The poor girl has doubtless received some terrible shock, and has, in all probability been the witness of some fearful scene, possibly of the killing of poor Old Pete."

"When she is herself again, she can probably tell us many things that we will be glad to know and may be able to explain Dainty's disappearance."

"I hope, for your wife's sake, for yours and ours, that she may, Kit," answered Frank, for himself and his two friends, "and I swear that I will not rest until Mrs. Barton is safe among us again, while if aught has happened to her, no mercy shall be shown the wretch who wrought this deed."

"Sleep shall not visit my eyelids, nor food nor drink pass my lips until she is found," added Dan, lifting his hat solemnly in proof of the strength of his oath, while Charley broke out, impetuously.

"And if I rest until Mrs. Barton is restored to her husband may I be dealt with accordingly!"

"Thank you, boys, thank you," replied Kit, much affected, while the tears rose to his eyes at this proof of the devotion of his friends.

"I do not dare hope that she is unharmed, yet who would harm her?"

"The madman! the madman!"

And as if in answer to his question the girl, who had recovered consciousness again, wailed out the words, while the four friends shrunk back in superstitious horror at the mournful reply.

"Be calm, Jenny," whispered Kit, bending over the maid, and nervously himself with a tremendous effort, "there are none but your friends here, and you have nothing to fear."

And as intelligence dawned fully on the girl's dazed brain, she opened her eyes and looking around, recognized the four men, when her look became more quiet and the terror gradually faded from her face.

But she was yet very hysterical, and half-raising herself, she sobbed:

"Oh, my poor mistress, what has happened to her! and poor Old Pete! Ah!" with a wild scream, "I can hear the crash yet that I heard when the blow fell on his head, and can see the red blood spurting from his throat!

"Oh, my God! what a picture!"

It was with much difficulty that Kit succeeded in quieting her and preventing her again fainting, but finally she grew calm and was able to swallow a glass of wine that Charley had provided for her, and, sitting up, was sufficiently restored to tell what she knew.

But as she was about to commence, a noise outside attracted the attention of the four friends, and looking from the front windows they saw a buggy drawn up in the road, in which were seated two persons, while a man, who had evidently been riding a saddled horse that stood near, was walking up the path that led to the house.

"Who is that, Frank?" asked Kit.

"Never saw them before in my life, that I know of, did you Charley, or you Dan?"

Both of them having replied in the negative, Kit continued:

"I will soon find out. Wait here, please, until I return," and hurrying down-stairs, he opened the front door just as the stranger set foot on the porch.

"Good-afternoon, sir," said the latter, courteously lifting his hat; "I was told in the town that I could find Mr. Barton here; can I see him?"

"That is my name, sir, what can I do for you?"

"There is a gentleman in the buggy, there, who has come all the way from New York to find you."

"To find me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Strange, I did not know—but what is the gentleman's name?"

"Bentley, Curtis Bentley."

"Not at all familiar; but of course I will go and speak to him; but he is not alone."

"No, sir; in fact there are three of us."

"And you are?"

"A. Fox, detective, of New York."

"So. And this, I suppose," he continued, as they reached the buggy, "is Mr. Bentley."

"Yes, sir," replied one of the occupants of the buggy, "and this is my brother, Mr. Henry Bentley."

"Glad to see you, gentlemen, although you arrive at a sad moment."

"Is there any way in which I can be of service to you?"

"Yes, sir," answered Bentley's stern tones, the reply coming on Kit like a thunderbolt; "You can probably aid me in finding Craig Colton, who stabbed me, as I thought, and he also, to death, and then fled to Colorado, disguised as one Edward Worthington."

"He came, he claimed, with the intention of purchasing a mine, but as we think with the object of murdering you and your wife, that he might obtain possession of her fortune!"

"Colton! Worthington! my wife! me!" stammered Kit; "gentlemen, this is a serious matter and must be looked into."

"Charley!" and as the other appeared in response to his call, he continued; "please see to these horses; gentlemen, walk into the house."

And without demur the new arrivals followed him into the sitting-room, when Kit, excusing himself, hurried up-stairs for a moment, where he found the girl so excited on account of this interruption that he saw that it would not be possible for her to be coherent a minute at a time.

So he advised her to lie down for a while, promising that none of them would leave the house, and saying to Frank:

"Precious as every moment is, there is nothing to be gained by urging this poor girl, for until she is less nervous she can not possibly relate to us what she knows."

"So come down-stairs, and you, Jenny, lie down and try to sleep; it will do you good and you need fear nothing."

And the girl consenting Kit led the way down stairs, followed by Frank and Dan, while the frightened girl bolted and locked the door and closed the windows before she dared try to sleep so nervous was she.

And, the three entering the parlor, where they were at that moment joined by Charley, requested their visitors to be seated, and then prepared themselves to listen to what they might have to say.

CHAPTER XIII.

M R. FOX ADVISES.

BENTLEY naturally constituted himself spokesman, and told his story from beginning to end, not sparing himself nor seeking to palliate his criminal intentions.

"I was dazed," said he, "by the glowing pictures that Colton painted, and dazzled by the prospect of securing, at one stroke, the wealth he promised me if I would follow his counsels."

"He had been here and made Mr. Danford's acquaintance, winning his confidence to a certain extent, so that when your wife's father"—addressing Kit—"came to New York, he asked Colton to recommend him to some lawyer, and that was the way we met."

"I betrayed him, and am partially responsible for his death; but, after Colton had attempted to assassinate me, and I lay for long weeks in my bed with nothing to do but think, I realized fully to what depths of degradation I had fallen, and how fearfully criminal I had been in allying myself with such a man as my accomplice had proven himself to be."

"A liar, a thief, a murderer, an assassin; had I not become the same through countenancing, aiding and abetting him in his evil designs?"

"And I repented it bitterly then, and bitterly do I repent it now."

"If I deserve the penitentiary or worse, send me to prison or to death; but first let me track this man to earth, that I may at least have the thought to console me that I have rid society of one scoundrel, and sent him to the punishment he so justly merits; then do with me as you will."

And as he ceased speaking, he buried his face in his hands, while his whole frame trembled and shook with the pangs of remorse.

"It is not for me to judge you," replied Kit, "and your conscience is its own punishment. And now that you have, I believe, sincerely repented, and are endeavoring to your utmost to right the wrong you did my wife and me, for her and for myself I pardon you freely and fully."

"God bless you for that, Mr. Barton—God bless you for that! Such words as those from your lips are more dear to me than a thousand such fortunes as I plotted to gain!"

And grasping Kit's outstretched hand he shook it warmly, while Frank and Charley and Dan in turn clasped his fingers in warm approval of his actions.

Then, when they had all settled down again after this little display of feeling, Bentley asked Kit what had happened at the cottage that he had referred to.

"That you may understand," answered Kit, "I must tell you what has occurred since I returned yesterday morning, and, indeed, it is best you should be familiar with the events of the past two days, that you may fully understand."

"In the first place, I must inform you of one thing: Colton—if he and Worthington were really one and the same, and there seems to be no doubt of that—Colton is—dead!"

"Dead!" exclaimed the three new arrivals in chorus.

"Dead."

"And how and when?" asked Bentley.

"Some months ago, he was killed by being washed over a cliff by a stream into which he had fallen accidentally."

"But you are sure?"

"Certain, beyond a doubt."

"Then I come too late for revenge; but, at least he is now harmless to injure you."

"Excuse me, however, for interrupting you, and let us know what has happened here."

And in as few words as he could, Kit told them of the occurrences of the past three days, beginning with the discovery of the murdered man's body and ending with the events that had taken place during the past few hours.

"And do you suspect no one?" asked Fox, who had been an attentive listener.

"From what Jenny cried when she recovered from her first fainting-fit, I am almost positive that the madman with whom I had the encounter at the Faithful mine is at the bottom of this last murder and this abduction."

"And I have sworn not to rest until I have found my wife and punished the man who carried her off."

"And I!" said the three friends, Frank, Charley and Dan, as with one voice.

"Now look here, gentlemen," said Fox, so earnestly that all were impressed by his tone: "you are now coming to something in which I have had many years' experience, and I am going to tell you something."

"You are all young and hot-headed, and under the influence of the moment have made rash vows which it would be the height of foolishness to keep."

"You would, not one of you, starve a horse you were about to enter in a race for a purse, yet in this race for life you weaken yourselves at the outset."

"No, gentlemen. No! Eat a hearty meal to-night, sleep soundly afterward, and to-morrow—for it is now too late to do anything," pointing to the setting sun as he spoke—"we will set out, and, my word as a detective who has never failed, we will find the young lady and bring her back."

"Sensibly spoken by a sensible man!" cried Kit, "and it would be the height of foolishness to do otherwise than as you suggest, and I for one, will take your advice, although it seems hard to lag, when my poor Dainty is in distress, and I am sure that my friends will agree with me and act as I do."

"Whatever you decide, Kit, we will abide by: won't we boys?" asked Frank.

And Charley and Dan having answered in the affirmative, they again settled down to the important business of the hour.

"Now, gentlemen, that that little matter is settled, suppose you secure me for a time, and I will take a look around."

"Certainly, Mr. Fox: would you like to have one of us to go with you and show you about the house and grounds?"

"Thank you, sir, yes. Suppose that you come with me, Mr. Charley, and we will first go out to the stable and see the dead negro."

"Yes, and, Charley, please lay his body on his cot; we will bury him to-morrow; the dead must not be entirely neglected for the living."

"All right, Kit," and Charley, rising, left the room, followed by the detective, and led the way to the stable.

The body of Old Pete still lay in the place where they had first found it, and Fox, throwing the doors of the stable wide open, that he might have plenty of light, began to examine the corpse with all the care of a surgeon about to begin a *post-mortem*.

Having finished his scrutiny, he then requested Charley to aid him when they carried the poor fellow's body into the room he had occupied during life, and which formed part of the stable, laid it on the cot and, covering the corpse with a blanket, silently withdrew, locking the door after them.

"Now, young fellow, suppose that you feed the horses, they may have a hard day's work before them, to-morrow."

"I'll take a stroll by myself and come back

soon; but don't wait for me; I may be gone some time."

And Mr. Fox, walking off as unconcernedly as if on Broadway, soon disappeared over the brow of the hill, while Charley, having fed and bedded the horses, returned to the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW THE MANIAC CAME.

THE evening wore away, and darkness came on yet Fox had not returned, so at Bentley's suggestion they decided not to wait for him any longer, and after eating a hearty meal, retired for the night, Kit, however, insisting on sleeping in the sitting-room, so that he might let the detective in should he come back during the night."

"Don't worry about Fox," said Bentley; "he is one of the shrewdest men that ever New York saw, and will get into no trouble from which he cannot escape."

"I have no doubt that he has discovered some clew and that he is following it up, and really do not see the necessity of waiting for him."

"Well, it will do no harm, and in case anything turns up, I will be on hand."

"And, besides, should he return to-night, he will want some lunch, for you say that he has eaten nothing since this morning."

"That is true; but you can depend on it, that if Fox needs anything, he will procure it by some means or the other."

"I am glad to hear you speak thus of him, for he doubtless will be of inestimable service to us in our search, although I have no doubt that we will find some trace of Dainty, my wife, in the morning."

"And what are your plans, if I may ask?"

"We will first see what Jenny has to say and if my theory is correct, and the madman has had something to do with this affair, we will go at once to the Faithful mine and search that neighborhood thoroughly."

"If we are not successful there, I confess that I will be at a loss what to do."

"Well, let us hope for the best. Good-night."

"Good-night, Mr. Bentley. Charley will show you and your brother to your room."

"I will have to ask you to be satisfied with one room between you, as the house is not very large; but you will find two comfortable beds there."

"Which is one more than we need. I only hope we are not turning any one else out?"

"Not at all. There are three bedrooms left—one for Frank and Charley, one for Dan, and another for Mr. Fox when he returns."

"Good-night, all."

And in a short time the household sunk to slumber, and nothing occurred to disturb them during the entire night.

With the first break of day Kit was up and stirring, and stepped outside to see if there were any signs of the detective, but there was no one in sight; so he re-entered, went to the kitchen, and was actively engaged in preparing breakfast when the others came down-stairs.

"Charley," said Kit, raising his voice so as to be heard above the sizzling and the spluttering of the frying-pan, "go up and knock at the door of my wife's room, and ask Jenny if she is well enough to dress and come down-stairs."

"She must be hungry, poor child, and if she does not feel like leaving the room, we can send something up to her."

So Charley went to the door and knocked, when it was instantly opened by Jenny, who was completely dressed and looked much rested, although she was decidedly pale.

"How do you feel this morning, Jenny?" asked Charley, kindly.

"Oh, much better, sir, thank you, for I slept very well indeed, although at first my dreams were something terrible."

"Well, you had better come down-stairs and have some breakfast, for you must feel faint, and a cup of coffee will do you good."

"Why, sir, I was just going to the kitchen to get breakfast ready when you knocked."

"Well, you are too late to do that. Mr. Barton has acted cook, and everything is prepared."

"Oh, that is too bad; but I can serve it, at any rate," and she hurried down to the kitchen, where she apologized a thousand times for her tardiness.

But Kit soon put a stop to that, and in a few minutes the table was ready, when they seated themselves, all joining Kit in requesting pretty Jenny to pour out the coffee and to take her seat at the table with them, to which, after some demur, she consented.

When all had been served Kit asked Jenny to

tell them what had happened, so that they might lose no time, but start immediately after breakfast in search of Dainty.

"I was seated in Mrs. Barton's room, doing some sewing, when she asked me to go downstairs and make her a cup of tea, for it was about noon, and she wished some lunch."

"So going to the kitchen, I proceeded to light the fire, when I found that there was no wood in the box, and stepped to the back door to call Old Pete and ask him to bring some in."

"But, as I looked out, the blood seemed to freeze in my veins, and I was paralyzed with terror so that my feet seemed fastened to the ground and my tongue felt as if glued to the roof of my mouth; I could neither call out nor escape and stood there like one dazed, while the terrible scene before me burnt itself into my brain and into my memory."

Pete was standing just inside the open door of the stable, washing a set of harness, whistling gleefully, and his back turned toward me, while just behind him and crawling stealthily toward the unsuspecting negro was a horrible-looking figure that I thought the wildest and the fiercest that I had ever seen."

"You could not see his face, I suppose," said Kit, interrupting the girl intentionally, that she might have time to recover from her ever-increasing excitement.

"No, sir; his back was toward me and I could only see his matted white hair, the rags in which he was clothed, his bare feet and his long, bony fingers as they clutched a murderous-looking white club, with a large knot on the end of it, and raised it high above his head."

"And in an instant the blow descended and poor Pete crashed face downward to the floor, when his assassin leaped upon him, turned him on his back and drawing a knife, slashed him across the face and throat and then began a series of wild leaps and jumps, that convinced me that he was mad."

"And then realizing, it seemed for the first time, that my own life was in danger, I turned and with a loud cry, fled into the house, looking over my shoulder as I ran, when, to my horror, I saw that he was pursuing me."

Rushing up-stairs to Mrs. Barton's room to warn her, and hurrying inside, I turned to close and lock the door; but it caught on the mat and would not close, and at that moment the rapid feet that were following me leaped up the stairs, a dozen at a time it seemed to me, and the wild figure bounded into the room just as I slipped behind the half-open door and concealed myself.

And as the maniac dashed into the room he raised his murderous club on high, while Mrs. Barton, folding her arms, stood confronting him, with a look of quiet scorn on her face."

CHAPTER XV.

MR. FOX RETURNS.

FOR a moment the girl ceased speaking, while Kit murmured a few words to himself, and then said aloud:

"I know how my wife's bravery would sustain her in such an emergency; but what happened then?"

"For a few minutes they gazed at each other," continued Jenny; "the shifting eyes of the madman wavering beneath Mrs. Barton's steady look, until, finally, he leaped forward, grasped her about the waist and swung her on his shoulder as if she had been a feather, and then turned abruptly and left the room, shouting and howling with an insane delight."

"At that moment the tension became too great, for I thought that he intended to murder Mrs. Barton and then return and do away with me, and a mist spread before my eyes, I reeled and fell, and knew nothing more until I came to my senses and saw you bending over me."

"And did the madman say nothing; utter no words?"

"No sentence that I could catch, although I distinctly heard him mutter something about revenge and Danford and murder."

"The vaporings of a disordered brain, no doubt," added Frank, as he rose from the table.

"And now, Kit, what do you suggest?"

"Mr. Bentley," said the young fellow, nodding to Frank to wait a moment, "a few days of our bracing Colorado air will make you a new man, but let me advise you not to over-exert yourself. A person who is not acclimated easily exhausts himself in this light air, so I would advise you to remain about the house for a few days, and rest. I will see that you and your brother are well-armed, and need not request you to shoot that maniac down, should he return, as you would a mad-dog."

"By remaining here you can protect the house and see that no harm comes to Jenny, for, poor

child, I would not agree to her remaining here alone."

"In a few days you can begin to take regular exercise, but just now we four will go in search of my wife. What do you say?"

I will agree to anything that you may suggest, Mr. Barton, and of course Henry will do whatever I ask."

"Then that matter is settled."

"And now, Frank, as to your question: We will start out, you, Charley, Dan and I, and will scour the country in every direction, returning here every night to report and consult, for we will each take a different direction, you going into the canyon, Dan and Charley taking the road east and west, respectively, while I will again visit the locality of the Faithful mine, and see if I can find any trace of the madman."

And the three friends, having seen that Bentley and his supposed brother were thoroughly armed and able to resist any violence that might be attempted, left the house, went to the stable and there constructed a coffin as well as they could with the materials and tools at their disposal, placed the body of Old Pete therein, and, digging a grave down near the banks of the stream that flowed along back of the house, buried him, silently and sorrowfully.

For Pete had been a faithful servant and they mourned his loss as sincerely as if he had been a companion instead of a domestic.

And then, saddling their horses, they were about to ride off, when their attention was attracted by a figure which appeared in the distance, walking slowly toward them, and as it drew near they saw that it was Fox, who came along slowly, whistling as unconcernedly as if he had been strolling up his favorite Broadway, and switching right and left with a light cane he had cut from some neighboring bush.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he cried, as he came within speaking distance, greeting them as coolly as if he had not been absent all night, but had occupied a bed in the cottage.

"Good-morning, Mr. Fox," replied the three, one after the other, when Kit continued:

"You have had an extensive walk, Mr. Fox, or at least it seems so from the looks of your shoes."

"Yes, I've had quite a stroll," returned the other, indifferently, eying with much apparent interest an eagle that was soaring far above their heads.

"Any news?"

"News?"

"Yes."

"About what?"

"Why, about my wife; about the maniac!" answered Kit, impatiently, somewhat vexed by the other's seeming indifference.

"Oh! About Mrs. Barton I know nothing, but as to the maniac, he is treed."

"Treed?"

"Treed; or rather trapped. I have him securely fixed where he won't suffer from too much exercise, and where he will await until I return even if I should be absent for a year or so."

"But, for Heaven's sake, Fox," cried Kit, "tell us what has happened, or—"

"Now, Mr. Barton, be kind enough to listen to me a moment," replied the detective, earnestly, and dropping his indifferent manner as if it were a mask.

"Of the safety of your wife I am positive; how! by that intuition which becomes a second nature with men in my calling and I promise you that she shall be returned to you, safe and sound before the sun sets, or I will forfeit my reputation and turn cow-puncher."

"We are dealing with a man who is naturally shrewd, or I am much mistaken, and his natural shrewdness is heightened by his insane cunning, so that we must fight him with his own weapons and oppose cunning by cunning, shrewdness by shrewdness."

"Your wife has doubtless been hidden away in some secret place where we would never find her, unless we can compel the madman to disclose this hiding-place, and it is to attain this end that I am now striving."

"But," and his tone here became that of a person accustomed to order and be obeyed, "I must not be interfered with, or I cannot answer for the result."

"Please remember, gentlemen, that I am now engaged on something that a life experience and training have fitted me for, and that one false step may ruin all."

"May I ask, then, that you leave me to act as I think best and that you, for the time being, do as I ask? I will gladly relinquish the direction of matters if you think that any one of you can manage this affair better than I."

"Go ahead, Fox," cried Kit, heartily; "we have every confidence in you and will not interfere with your arrangements."

"What shall we do?"

"Stable your horses, go into the sitting-room and do not leave the premises until I instruct you to do so. You will hear from me soon."

And waiting until they were ready, he accompanied them into the house, where they went into the sitting-room, while he proceeded upstairs.

Informing Bentley of the reason of their return, they sat there chatting for some time, when suddenly Dan, who was facing the door, leaped to his feet with staring eyes, and pointed toward the hall, fairly shrieking:

"Look!"

And then staggered back into the corner, while the others, turning, gazed in terror at the apparition that stood in the open doorway.

CHAPTER XVI.

JUST IN TIME.

WHEN the maniac bounded into the room where Dainty was standing, she, brave girl that she was, did not attempt to escape, but stood her ground steadily and looked at him, with a slight sneer curling her delicate lips.

Her look cowed him for a moment, and then, with the fire of insanity glaring in his eyes with redoubled brightness, he sprung upon and seized her, lifted her from the floor with surpassing ease and strength, and hurried from the room.

He leaped down the stairs and out through the open door with incredible swiftness, the frail girl powerless in that iron clasp, and half-palsied by terror, and realizing that any effort to escape might result in a renewed frenzy and excess of passion on his part, did not endeavor to free herself, but lay quiescent in his arms.

Across the lawn, past the stable, through the open door of which she could see the body of Old Pete lying on the floor, and down to the bank of the creek he hurried, and reaching the stream turned up to the west and ran rapidly along for a couple of miles, never hesitating, never faltering, but pressing up the steep slope with undiminished speed.

Finally he stopped and laid the girl gently on the turf, and, taking his belt from his waist, tied her wrists together and fastened the other end of the rag to a tree, so high up that she was left in a sitting position.

Then picking up his knife, which had fallen from his belt, and leaving the thigh-bone he carried against the tree, he turned and plunged into the wood at the left, soon disappearing from sight, while the girl, raising herself, tugged and pulled and tore at her bonds until she had almost succeeded in freeing herself.

But as she gave one final wrench, the madman reappeared and again seized her, and picking up a club, he carried her on his shoulder deep into the recesses of the wood to a place where he had constructed a sort of roof by laying thickly leaved branches across two cut-stretching limbs of a tree, the roof being about six feet from the ground.

Dainty could not imagine what fate he had in store for her, but was not allowed much time for reflection, as he placed her against the trunk of the tree, and fastening her elbows behind her back tied her securely, and then, gathering her braided hair, attached a stout cord to the ends of it, and drawing the cord over one of the limbs above, tied it tightly, so that, even if she should succeed in freeing her hands, it would be almost impossible for her to release herself, so cunningly and skillfully was the twine twisted and knotted into her hair.

Then, having performed a sort of fantastic dance on the turf before her, brandishing his club and swinging it in such fearful circles about her unprotected head that she thought he intended striking her, he suddenly gave a wild yell and started off in the direction whence he had come, leaving her bound and entirely helpless.

The afternoon wore on and the shades of evening came down, until darkness settled down and night covered the scene; and Dainty stood there, having found that, struggle as she might, she could not release herself, and reserving her strength that she might be able to resist the fatigue that was slowly but surely assailing her.

The maniac, after reaching the stream, followed it down its course until he came to a point where it disappeared through an opening in the ground, below which what had evidently been the former bed of the stream lay dry and bare, its rocky surface showing no sign that the stream had flowed there in months.

Proceeding on down the bed he came to a point where it had worn a hole through the opposing mass of rock, and to enter which he was compelled to creep on hands and knees until the opening widened and grew higher and he was able to walk upright.

Through this species of tunnel he walked silently and cautiously, until he came to an opening in the side of the wall of rock, through which came a bright glare, and stopping, he peered cautiously in.

Inside was a large, vaulted cavern, the walls of which seemed to be one mass of gold-bearing quartz, and so rich was the rock in the precious metal that, in the light of a dozen lamps swung about, the sides and roof of the cavern glowed yellow and bright.

A dozen or twenty miners were at work in the cavern, picking out the ore with sturdy strokes, while others shoveled it into barrows, in which it was wheeled away to a shaft pierced into a passage leading from the cavern.

This was Kit Barton's mine, and so wonderfully productive was it that his wealth could only be estimated by millions, and was ever increasing, as the ore grew richer and richer as they penetrated deeper into the bowels of the earth.

As if fascinated, the maniac crouched there for several hours, watching the men hewing the riches from the mountain fastnesses, until one by one the miners quit work, and all the lamps save one were extinguished, the cavern being deserted save by the two watchmen, who seated themselves at the opposite end of the corridor and began to eat their evening meal.

Then the madman, taking a heavy parcel he found hidden under a heap of rubbish just underneath the hole which opened into the cavern, scrambled up the rock and dropped lightly and unseen inside, and placed the parcel he carried in one corner of the deserted cavern.

Then unrolling a long red cord he again climbed through the hole, and unwinding the ball of cord he carried, which was nothing more or less than a rapid fuse, he walked up the dry bed of the creek, crawled through the narrow passage that led to the air, and laid the end of the fuse on the dry rock.

Then stooping, he took from some hidden receptacle about his clothes a box of matches and tried to light one, but they were damp or spoiled in some manner, and he scratched one after the other without result.

So flinging the box far away from him, he tore a strip from his ragged garments and picked it apart, thread by thread, until he had a little bunch of lint lying in his hand, which would serve admirably as tinder, and then hunted about until he found a piece of flint rock, which holding in one hand, he struck with the back of the blade of his knife.

The first two or three efforts were ineffectual but at the third stroke a spark flew from the stone, but did not fall on the tinder, so, stooping yet lower he raised his knife to strike a second spark.

But at that moment a figure leaped from the bank above him, landing on his shoulders and hurling him to the ground, while a pair of muscular hands grasped his wrists and held them immovably fast, while the knife flew in one direction, the flint in another.

And Fox, with a celerity that showed long practice, slipped a pair of handcuffs on the maniac's wrists, and manacles on his ankles, and then, dragging him to the top of the bank slipped a chain through manacle and cuff and padlocked the ends about a tree near by.

"There, my candidate for the insane asylum," he muttered, "I think you will not escape before I return."

And then, unaware of the fuse lying there, which he had not seen in the darkness, he walked on down the bed of the creek and plunged into the tunnel to investigate the premises.

CHAPTER XVII.

DAN TO THE RESCUE.

FOR a moment Kit and his companions were struck speechless and could only gaze at the open doorway in which stood the apparition which had so startled them.

But had there been one of them who was not so much occupied that he could notice anything but that central figure, he would have remarked that the boy Henry did not seem at all startled, but on the contrary appeared to be decidedly amused.

At length Kit recovering himself somewhat, rose and advanced toward the door, saying, as he drew near the figure that had caused so much consternation:

"Are you Pete's twin brother or are you his ghost?"

For the man who had thus suddenly appeared before them was as like Pete as one pea is to another, and was dressed in a complete suit of the dead negro's clothes, so that the resemblance was almost perfect.

"Neither one nor the other," answered a voice that was decidedly familiar to all of them, being none other than that of A. Fox, esquire, detective.

"Your disguise is perfect, although, of course, the clothes add much to the illusion."

"Well, I am satisfied with the test," replied the detective, "and think that it will work to a charm when I try it on the lunatic, for I deceived you all, excepting the boy there, who has seen me in this disguise before."

"Nevertheless," answered Henry, "if I had not known that poor Old Pete was under the sod, I would not have been able to recognize you, and was for a moment, decidedly startled."

"And you propose to test the lunatic with this disguise?" asked Frank.

"Yes," replied the detective, entering the room and taking a chair in response to an invitation from Charley, while Dan, the superstitious, walked outside, a little ashamed of his recent exhibition of fear.

"I believe that I can frighten him into leading us to the place where he left your wife."

"Do you think that you can affect lunatics in that way?"

"Well, it can do no harm, and if my plan fails I am very much mistaken."

"But before we leave I must tell you how it happened that I remained away all night."

"After securing the madman—I will tell you some other time how I captured him—I followed on down the trail or rather bed of the creek, for some distance.

"I had seen my man coming from that direction and thought that I might possibly discover some trace of Mrs. Barton by following up this slight clew."

"So I walked on, crawled through the narrow passage, reached a sort of cleft in the rock along which I could walk upright and went on to the end, noticing as I went, an opening in the rock through which a light shone."

"My mine," explained Kit, "which I will take pleasure in showing you at some future time."

"Well, to make a long story short, I will say that I reached the end of this subterranean passage and looked out into an unknown depth, nearly stepping off in the darkness and breaking my neck."

"Yes, it is a dangerous place, and we must have it closed up."

"Well, I groped about until I found that there was a ladder—an iron ladder—which led to the foot of the cliff, and descending it I walked off into the wood, got lost and had to wait until daylight to find my way back."

"And you had nothing to eat?"

"Oh, yes. I found something in a cabin in the center of a clearing and also a good bed, so did not suffer any privation."

"But you learned nothing of Dainty—of my wife?"

"Not a thing; but now we must start, and here begins the time when you can aid me."

"And how?"

"It will not do for me to unloose my prisoner, so one of you will have to perform that task for me."

"When you release him, step back out of the way and I will appear before him, and if my idea is a correct one, the madman will flee in the direction whence he last came, and will thus lead us to Mrs. Barton."

"Then we, that is Frank, Charley, Dan, and I will go with you and when he tries to escape we will follow him."

"Exactly, while I return to the house and fix myself up, as I do not want to frighten Mrs. Barton by appearing before her in this shape."

"Very considerate indeed; and now let us be off; we have wasted too much time already."

So, calling Dan, they all started off, leaving the house and Jenny in charge of Mr. Bentley and Henry, who promised to guard both carefully.

It did not take very long for the four friends to reach the spot where the madman lay bound, and although he was pitching and tossing about and wrenching at the steel gyves, yet they were proof and did not give in the least.

At a signal from Kit, Dan walked up the creek a couple of hundred yards and hid in the trees, Charley doing the same half that distance away, while Frank went below and stationed

himself there that they might give pursuit if the detective's theory proved correct.

Then as the detective, from his hiding-place gave a low whistle Kit, taking the key, and having removed the maniac's knife and club to a safe distance, stooped and unlocked the manacles from feet and hands, when with a leap, the madman sprung to his feet and glared wildly about.

And at that moment, the bushes near him parted, and the figure of Pete stepped in full view, a ghastly gash across his throat and two crimson slashes on his forehead, and advanced toward the lunatic menacingly.

For a moment the maniac stood as if stricken to stone, and then, with a wild yell, he turned and fled up the creek, casting fearful glances over his shoulder and leaping away in a burst of tremendous speed that soon left Frank, Kit and Charley far behind.

But sturdy long-legged Dan kept up the chase and followed the maniac at a speed that equaled that of the fleeing man, ran close behind him up the hill, plunged into the woods after him, and seizing him in his powerful arms flung him far to one side, just as he was about to leap forward and strangle the fainting girl, whose strength was exhausted and would have fallen to the ground had it not been for the bonds that held her with such diabolical ingenuity.

And as Dan released her, Kit and his two friends came dashing up, followed by the detective, and aided her rescuer in restoring Dainty to consciousness.

The maniac had disappeared.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HENRY'S LOCKET.

MR. FOX, in his excitement, had forgotten all about his appearance and now stood, wiping the perspiration from his brow with his sleeve, the result being that his face was soon streaked with stripes of red black and white, where the paint rubbed off, until he looked as if he had been blacked-up for a minstrel show and then had assumed the part of a clown in a pantomime.

But he was suddenly recalled to a sense of his condition by Charley, who, happening to look at him, instantly burst into a fit of laughter, which however, he quickly checked, and then said to the detective:

"For goodness' sake, Fox, go and wash your face in the brook. If Mrs. Barton catches sight of your face after what she has gone through with it, it will certainly drive her crazy."

And the detective, realizing what a looking object he must be, left the party, and could soon be heard, puffing and blowing and splashing like a porpoise down by the creek.

In a short time Dainty was feeling somewhat restored, and Kit, sending Charley off to the house for a horse, led his wife to the stream and gave her a cooling draught of water, seating her in the saddle when the horse appeared, and supporting her tenderly to the cottage, where pretty Jenny had prepared an appetizing bowl of chicken soup for her.

And after she had partaken of some nourishment, she retired to her room, and feeling secure and safe, as she knew that her husband and his friends were watching over her, she soon fell into a deep sleep, which lasted until far into the next morning.

And during that day Kit and his three companions remained in the house, keeping Bentley and his brother company, while the restless Fox wandered about the neighborhood in a vain search for the madman, of whom he could, however, find no trace.

And toward evening he rode into Golder Gulch, where the miners had congregated in force, and calling them together he told them of the events of the past two or three days, first introducing himself to them.

"And now," he said, in conclusion, "you can all see what a viper you have been cherishing in aiding this madman."

"The happiness of Mr. Barton, his life may be, on one hand, the safety of this maniac on the other. I need not ask which you choose."

"And for the protection of your employer interests, I ask you, should you be able to capture this lunatic, who now has three murders on his hands that we know of, I hope and believe that you will spare no effort to do so."

"It is not safe that he should be abroad, and I will leave no stone unturned to place him in safe keeping."

"He is undoubtedly not responsible for actions, so does not deserve punishment; he does deserve being placed in a lunatic

lum, where he will be powerless to do injury to any one.

"Do any of you know his name or anything about him?"

"The boys call him the Mad Miner," answered a voice from the crowd; "but no one knows anything about him."

"He used to be around the Faithful mine, and would sometimes hammer out a little dust if he could get hold of a piece of quartz, and sometimes made a little stake out of the tailings, for which the boys would always give him more than the stuff was worth, wishing to help him a little."

"Well, if you can get hold of the Mad Miner, let me know, and I will see him safely placed in the hands of the authorities; but promise me not to inflict any injury on him, for I am an officer of the law, and will see that law respected, whether I am in Colorado or New York."

"Oh, we won't hurt him, if Mr. Barton requests it, although if the boys did as they wanted to after this last act of his against Mrs. Barton, they'd string the lunatic up to the first tree; am I right, fellows?"

"You bet you are!" cried a score of voices, while one of the miners added: "but w'ot Mister Barton sez goes, ev'ry time, an' we'll not harm ther cuss."

"Thank you, men, all of you, and now I must tell you that Mr. Barton wishes you not to work to-morrow, but to devote yourselves to scouring the country in search of the madman."

"Your pay goes on as usual."

"Thank you, sir, and thank Mr. Barton for us," replied the spokesman, Amos Baldwin, "and if the man is to be found we'll find him."

"Well, good-night."

"Good-night, sir," and then turning to the crowd Baldwin sung out:

"Three cheers for Mr. Fox!"

And amid the thundering of the hoarse voices, the detective doffed his hat and rode off toward the cottage.

Arriving there he stabled his horse and then entered the house, where he found the party at the table, all being present but Dainty, who was asleep and Jenny, who was watching her mistress, having taken a cup of tea when she had prepared the evening meal.

Fox reported the result of his visit to Kit and then seated himself at the table and ate a hearty meal, and when they had smoked and chatted a little they dropped out, one at a time and went to their rooms, Kit being the last and seeing that the house was locked up and that all the doors and windows on the first floor were locked and fastened.

The four friends and Fox were pretty well tired out and were soon sound asleep, while Bentley and Henry sat for some time, talking about various things.

"But your restaurant, Henry," said Bentley, in reply to a remark by the boy that he would willingly remain in Colorado all summer, if it were necessary and Bentley wished him to do so.

"Oh, the restaurant will take care of itself; most of my business is done in winter and even then I hardly make enough to keep the wolf from the door."

"But as long as I have a place to sleep and coal to keep me warm, I can manage to worry along somehow."

"Why don't you sell out?"

"A good joke; no one would buy the old shanty, and besides, it isn't mine. Some of Jordan's relatives may turn up any day and claim it."

"Then what will you do?"

"I don't know; I'll have to hustle around and get work of some sort."

"Well, don't worry about it; I'll see that you never want for anything, and will take you into my office and make a lawyer out of you; how would that suit?"

"Just my ambition; but I do not see how I can manage to support myself and study at the same time."

"I'll manage that."

"Much obliged, sir, but I'd rather— Pshaw!" he cried, as he stopped suddenly.

"What is the matter?"

"Why, I've broken the chain of my locket."

"I never knew you wore a locket."

"Yes, I have had it ever since I can remember, and have always worn it under my vest. The matron at the orphan asylum told me that it was a picture of my mother, judging from a note she said she had found in one of my pockets, sewed tightly inside."

"And did you see the note?"

"No, sir; it was accidentally destroyed."

"Can I look at your locket, and at the picture?"

"Certainly, sir!" And unfastening the clasp, Henry handed the locket to Bentley.

As he looked at it he clasped his hand to his forehead, gazed alternately at the picture and at the boy, and then cried:

"Great heavens! can it be possible?"

And gazing closer to the light, he studied the picture intently.

CHAPTER XIX.

A REMINISCENCE.

THE boy sat on the edge of his bed, looking at his friend in amazement, while the latter, deeply absorbed in the study of the miniature, seemed entirely oblivious of his surroundings.

At length he turned to the boy, and still holding the locket before his eyes, he said:

"But this note that you referred to—did you not learn its contents?"

"The matron told me of them and repeated the words to me as nearly as she could remember."

"And they were?"

"These:

"My only legacy to my boy, who will soon I see his mother, is the locket containing her picture, that I hang about his neck, and which I hope he will never part with."

"I will not tell him his father's name—my husband shall never know his son if I can prevent it; my son shall never know his father."

"For that father has abandoned his lawful wife and child, and shall not disgrace my boy by claiming him as his son."

"Dishonorable in every sense of the word—a gambler, a thief, a forger, a murderer—my eyes were never opened to his true character until after my boy was born."

"He was baptized Henry for no other reason than that it is not his father's name."

"And now, sir, you know all," added the boy, his voice trembling with emotion.

"And you have never tried to discover who your father was?"

"Never, sir. I have no desire to know the man who drove my mother to her grave."

"But should that man be dead?"

"I would learn the fact with pleasure."

"Then listen: Twenty years ago, or eighteen, maybe, I was living in Philadelphia, and was just beginning to practice my profession, and having been successful in one or two minor cases, thought that I was destined to become one of the shining lights of the legal fraternity.

"Near where I boarded lived a widow lady and her daughter, the latter a fair young thing, who seemed to make her home one continual carol of joy and mirth.

"They were in straitened circumstances, and Eleanor Vaughn had sought and obtained a position in a music store, for she was a perfect mistress of the piano and possessed a magnificent voice which had been thoroughly cultivated.

"I was returning home from my office one night, it being nearly eleven o'clock, having been detained until that hour by some pressing business, when, as I neared my boarding-house, I heard a scream down the street and, not thinking of what the consequences might be, ran as rapidly as I could to the corner, where I found Miss Vaughn struggling with a villainous-looking scoundrel who was trying to steal her purse.

"She had been singing at a concert, that night and returned on the cars with some friends, leaving them at the corner, having but a few steps to walk and declining any further escort; this I learned afterward.

"A blow was enough to stop the disturbance and to send the ruffian sprawling in the gutter, and then offering my arm to the lady, and mentioning my name and where I lived, I walked with her to her home and saw her safely in the house.

"And blessing my stars for this fortunate chance—for I had seen her often before, and believe that I loved her then—I walked to my own door and was stooping to insert my latch-key, when I received a tremendous blow on the head, that sent me senseless to the pavement; the ruffian had stolen up behind me and struck me with a slung-shot, being instantly arrested by a policeman who saw the occurrence from the other side of the street.

"It is needless to say that I was unable to leave my bed for a long time, but I must add that every day during my convalescence the daintiest jellies and broths were sent in by Mrs. or Miss Vaughn, while a pretty bunch of flowers often enlivened the monotony of my sick-room and cheered my eye by their beauty.

"This was the beginning of our acquaintance and it flowed on smoothly until I was about to venture to ask for her hand and heart when the serpent entered my Eden.

"There came to board in the house where I was living, a young fellow who was the perfection of manly beauty and who possessed all the magnetism and attraction of a Mephistopheles, and, well—he met Miss Vaughn and she became infatuated with him.

"There is no need of going into particulars; after they were married I moved to New York and soon they came to the same city, where we three became the closest friends and I buried my love deep down in my heart and no one has ever known of it until to-night.

"For I had never whispered a word of love to Eleanor and she, poor girl, never suspected the truth.

"They suddenly disappeared, and when I next met him, several years afterward, he told me of being suddenly called abroad and of having written to me, and as I had been absent in the West about the time mentioned, I believed him; but have since learned that he was compelled to flee the country on account of supposed complicity in some famous bank robbery.

"And when I asked after his wife he told me that she had died in Paris, and that her baby boy had died the next day, and that they both occupied the same grave in the Protestant cemetery in Paris."

And as he ceased speaking Bentley buried his face in his hands, and struggled with the emotions that almost overpowered him.

But quickly recovering himself, he continued:

"On account of former associations, we soon became fast friends, and it was through his influence and silky ways that I was led into the plot against Mr. Danford and his daughter, and which I have so deeply repented.

"And from the time that I met him, when he told me that he had been out of the country until now, I have never doubted the truth of his story regarding his wife and child."

The boy had become deeply interested, and with parted lips hung on every word that Bentley uttered, but when the latter spoke of being led into the plot against Mr. Danford and his daughter, of which the lad had heard, he began to tremble violently and grew deadly pale.

"And now, my boy, my adopted brother," proceeded Bentley, "dear to me before, dearer to me now that I know you to be the son of my dead love, be strong, for I must tell you the name of the man who, after ruining your mother's happiness, has left you as a legacy nothing but a name which you must scorn.

"The man who stole away my love, who deserted her and you—was Craig Colton!"

CHAPTER XX.

"TED'S" FRIENDS.

BENTLEY had turned as he spoke those last words, and stood buried in thought, with his back toward Henry Colton, as he must now be called, but hearing no sound, he turned and glanced toward the boy.

And lying there, as white as the sheets that covered the bed, he saw the lad, as motionless as if a merciful Providence had stricken him to his death.

Hastening to his side he tried in vain to arouse him, and finally, becoming frightened lest the boy might die, he hurried to Kit's room, and tapping gently on the door, succeeded in arousing him without disturbing any of the rest of the household.

"What is it?" cried Kit, anxiously, as he saw the white, scared face of Bentley at the half-opened door.

"My brother is seriously ill, and I want your assistance."

"Wait a moment and I'll be with you," replied Kit, and in a short time he came out, half-dressed and ready to accompany Bentley.

"What is the matter?" he asked, as they hurried through the hall.

"A severe mental shock has rendered him insensible, and I cannot arouse him."

"A mental shock?"

"Yes."

"You have not seen anything of the maniac?"

"Oh, no; I will explain later."

"You are right," and hurrying into the room found the boy still lying insensible, but after a long-continued effort, during which armchair and brandy were freely used, they aroused him, only to find that his brain was unbalanced and that he was tossing in all the delirium of a brain fever.

The matter was too serious to be trifled with, and Kit, going to Dan's room, wakened him and requested him to ride off to Golden Gulch in search of a physician who had recently settled there and whose practice, up to this time, had been confined to gun-shot wounds, fractures and

an occasional stab or cut by way of changing the monotony of the thing.

And then returning to Bentley's room he seated himself by the tossing lad, whose only utterance was a constant repetition of the words:

"Oh, my mother! my poor mother!" while his head rocked unceasingly from side to side.

And Bentley told Kit the story the boy had just heard and which had been such a terrible blow to him, while Kit, when the sad tale was ended, could only murmur:

"Poor boy! poor boy! a sad legacy he has inherited just as life seemed so bright to him!"

Silence fell on the twain. Nothing was heard in the room but the moaning of the sick boy and his constantly recurring moan:

"Oh, my mother! my poor mother!"

Dr. Gordon arrived, and in his cheery presence the two watchers seemed to gain new hope and increased courage.

"A mental shock, hey?" said the doctor, as he held Henry's wrist and counted the pulse-beats while he looked at his watch. "Frightened, I suppose. Do not think me inquisitive, Mr. Barton, but between doctor and patient, as with lawyer and client, there should be no secrets, you know. Does this arise from fright or—"

"He has just learned, doctor, that his father was one of the greatest villains unhung, that he drove his mother to the grave by his cruelty and that the man whom he had come to Colorado to track to the gallows, but who is now dead, was his own father whom he had never known."

"Poor lad! Enough, coming all at one time, to unhinge an older brain than his; but we will pull him through; youth, an excellent constitution, and careful nursing will do as much for him as my poor treatment. I must ask one of you gentlemen to ride back to the town with me and bring some medicine for him; I'll be back early in the morning."

And the kind-hearted physician, shaking hands all round, bowed himself out, followed by Dan and Charley, the latter having risen and come into the room, accompanied by Frank.

And soon the detective lounged into the sick-chamber when, to him and Frank, Bentley repeated what he had already told Kit.

"But are you sure that you are not mistaken?" insisted the detective, suspicious by nature and training, and in the habit of probing all things to the bottom.

"Would you recognize the portrait of the girl you once loved, even though fifty, instead of a little more than fifteen, years had elapsed since you last saw her?"

"I must say that I undoubtedly would," the detective was compelled to confess.

"But if you want any stronger proof," added Bentley, "take this locket and pry out the ivory miniature. It was painted a short time before Miss Vaughn's marriage and should have her name on it, written in her own hand."

So, taking the case, the detective inserted the point of his knife gently behind the ivory leaf and removed it from its frame without difficulty, and turning it over so that the reverse side was turned toward him, he read, while the others craned forward to see:

ELEANOR VAUGHN,

June 16, 1866."

"The proof is complete, Mr. Bentley," said the detective, after a moment's silence, "and you must pardon my incredulity."

"You were perfectly justified in being skeptical, Mr. Fox," returned Bentley, "for the whole story sounds like a romance."

"Well," said Frank, "if Harry, there, is the son of Craig Colton, all I have to say is that he is one of the richest boys in Colorado."

"What do you mean?" cried Kit.

"Simply that he owns the Faithful mine."

"The Faithful?"

"Exactly."

"By Jove, you are right, Colton did own that when he died."

"Yes, if he is dead. As a lawyer, Mr. Bentley, you can answer this question better than any one else here."

"Does not the fact of a person's death have to be legally established before the heir can come into possession of the property?"

"Most certainly."

"Then Harry there will have to prove his father's death, and it will take money to carry the case through the courts."

"Now, as a friend of the boy, I will ask to be appointed his guardian, Kit here will go on my bond for a million or two and I will put the case in your hands."

"Whenever you want a few thousands to push the thing why—draw twice the amount needed

—I'll give you blank checks enough—and push them twice as fast as you ordinarily would."

"By George, Frank, you're a brick," cried Kit, shaking his friend warmly by the hand.

"You are indeed," added Bentley, "but there will be no question of money, Colton and I were joint partners in the Faithful mine, as my papers will show, and I am going to make a will to-night, that you can witness, leaving everything I own to Harry, there."

"Mr. Bentley," said Frank, "I withdraw my proposition, and resign in your favor."

"But here come the medicines; now let us go to work and see how soon we can get this poor boy into a condition to enjoy his new fortune."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAD MINER'S TRIUMPH.

As soon as the opiates that were freely administered to Henry began to take effect, the doctor's directions being carefully followed, he became much easier, and the friends, after witnessing Mr. Bentley's will retired, leaving him and the detective to watch the patient, Kit and Frank, who seemed much attached to the boy, insisting on relieving them at four o'clock.

So, the next morning, when the doctor arrived, he found his patient much improved and promised that the boy would soon be up and well.

And in the afternoon, when Dainty had heard the story, she insisted on doing her share of the nursing and, her warm woman's heart going out to the poor boy, she cared for him as tenderly as if he had been a brother.

And as he seemed to be rapidly improving, Kit proposed to Fox that they should take a stroll, and that he would show him his mine, to which the detective readily consented, while Frank, Dan and Charley agreed to go with them, Bentley being left in charge of the house, while Kit advised his wife to close and fasten all the doors and windows on the first floor that she might not run any risk from a second visit of the maniac.

And the five men, leaving the house, walked down to the road and thence to a gully which was washed in the bluff on the north bank of the road, and from which the undergrowth that had once choked it had been cleared away, having given place to an inclined plane, down which the loaded cars, filled with ore, ran, their weight pulling the empty cars to the top.

Half-way up the gully was the shaft leading to the mine and here stood an engine used for raising and lowering the buckets of ore, but which now stood silent, as the engineer and fireman had joined the miners in their hunt for the madman.

But there was a small cage that could be worked by hand and in this they safely descended to the bottom, finding the mine deserted, as every one in the neighborhood had joined in the search for the lunatic.

So, walking along the passage that led to the cavern, Kit called the detective's attention to the masses of almost virgin gold that were in sight and told him how the mine had been bequeathed to him by an old friend of his father, whom he had accidentally encountered in New York.

Fox was dazzled by this enormous wealth, and when Kit told him that in the canyon, in which Fox had passed a night, his wife owned a mine which was equally as valuable as this one, the face of the man was a study.

"I have read and dreamed of such wealth as this," said he, "but never was face to face with it before, and can scarcely comprehend it."

"But what surprises me more than anything else, is, that you and Mrs. Barton, possessing these enormous riches, should be content to remain here, while there is nothing on earth that you could not command, no country that you could not visit and be royally welcomed."

"We do intend to make a trip around the world, and will start in the fall for San Francisco, but we are here to try and induce our friends to join us, and hope that they will."

"I am anxious that Bentley and Henry should join us, and now extend an invitation to you to be my guest."

"You are very kind, but—" and here Fox slapped his pocket with a gesture that spoke louder than words.

"Such trips are not for poor men like myself," he added, "much as I would enjoy it."

"Now do not think twice about that. Should I ask you to become my guest for a month's trip on my yacht you would not hesitate, I am sure. Consider the invitation as being for a couple of years, and say 'Yes.'

"I have a nice little craft—the steam yacht 'Dainty'—lying in the Golden Gate, awaiting

my orders, and in that vessel we can have a very pleasant cruise.

"What do you say; you are not detained by any family ties?"

"No; I have no relative on earth that I know of, and nothing of that sort prevents."

"Well, then, consider it a bargain."

"I will, since you are so kind; but are these gentlemen going with you?"

"They have not yet decided; boys, you had better settle the question now, is it a go?"

"I don't want to say no and I dislike to say yes, Kit, for I am afraid that we would crowd you," answered Frank.

"Crowd! that is a good one! My yacht can easily accommodate twenty guests and we will be but ten or a dozen."

"Then, in that case I say yes, and am much obliged for the invitation."

"Then I'll go too, Kit," said Dan.

"And you, Charley," persisted Kit, as his friend remained unaccountably silent.

"I'll see about it later."

"Later nonsense. Decide now; you have nothing to detain you; no one to consult."

"Don't be too sure about that," said Frank, undeterred by a "shut up!" from his brother.

"Hello! what's up now?"

"Why, Charley is thinking of getting married."

"Married! Charley!" burst out Kit, decidedly astonished.

"Yes, he has tired of bachelor life and thinks of taking to himself a wife and settling down, that is if the young lady agrees, for he has not asked her yet."

"And who is the object of his adoration?"

"Now hold on, fellows," interrupted Charley, "this isn't fair. Wait until the matter is settled and then I'll tell you all about it. I confided in Frank, thinking he would respect my secret, but I see that I was wrong."

"I'll bet, let me see," said Kit, musingly, "I'll bet this mine against a kiss for your future wife, Charley, that I name the girl."

"An easy bet to lose, Kit," said Dan, cruelly, "for, to win it, Charley might shift his affections."

"That's so, and I withdraw my proposition."

"But, listen, Charley, and I'll whisper my guess to you."

So, Charley bending over, Kit put his lips to his ear and whispered two syllables, to which his friend nodded an affirmative answer.

"Then I congratulate you, my boy," cried Kit, heartily, extending his hand.

But at that instant a flash of fizzing flame leaped through the air from the opening that was broken in one side of the cavern, a red blaze flashed from the corner and at the same moment a roar as if from a thousand cannon burst on their ears, the shock throwing them flat on their faces, while the air was full of flying fragments of rock and timber and their nostrils were filled with the clouds of sulphurous smoke that enveloped them.

And the walls of the cavern seemed to crumble away, while the roof and supporting timbers fell in with a crash, burying the quintette many feet deep beneath the debris.

The mountain rocked as if it would topple from its base, and then as the roar died away they could hear, echoing through the bowels of the earth, a wild cry of discordant laughter that rung like a knell in their ears, and they realized that they were the victims of the Mad Miner's machinations.

CHAPTER XXII.

SAFE AND SOUND.

JENNY CROSBY was sitting in a pleasant little room singing to herself, and with a bright, pleasant glow on her face, as if her thoughts were of the happiest, while now and then she blushed rosy-red as some secret wish made itself manifest.

She nominally occupied the position of Mrs. Barton's maid, but there was nothing menial about her work, her duties being mostly confined to light sewing and such tasks, although, in a case like the present, she was willing and ready to attend to preparing the meals.

She was more of a companion than a servant, and was of excellent family and education, her father, who had been a clergyman, having died and left her in straitened circumstances, she having lost her mother some time before.

Dainty Barton had heard of her through an acquaintance in New York, and had immediately gone to see her and offered her a home, which offer the girl gladly accepted, only too happy to escape the drudgery of her position.

So now pretty Jenny was as happy as the day

was long, and had made instant friends of Kit's comrades, all of whom treated her with the utmost deference and respect and were ever on the watch to aid her by performing such little offices as bringing in wood, carrying water, and making the fire, that they might lessen her labors.

But as Jenny sat there sewing, there suddenly came a muffled roar that sounded like some distant explosion, while the house trembled, the windows shook, and the sashes rattled as though they would fall from their frames.

She had watched the party when they left the house and knew they were going to the mine, and instantly the thought of possible danger to one or all of them flashed through her mind, blanched her cheek and caused her heart to stop beating for an instant.

But at that moment she heard the voice of Mrs. Barton calling to her, and going to the foot of the stairs she answered the summons.

"What was that terrible noise, Jenny?" asked Mrs. Barton, anxiously.

"I do not know, I am sure; but it seemed to proceed from the direction of the mine, and—"

"And what?" cried Dainty, as the girl hesitated.

"I feared some accident might have happened to Mr. Francis, or to some of them."

"What accident could happen?" inquired Dainty, her voice beginning to tremble.

"I have heard Mr. Barton say that they used powder, or dynamite, or something, in blasting, and I was afraid—"

"That it had accidentally exploded!" fairly shrieked the other.

"Oh, my poor husband, are you injured?" she moaned, and then recovering herself, she again called out:

"As soon as I can put my shoes on, I will join you, and we will hasten to the mine and learn the worst."

"You had better let me go," interposed Bentley's voice, who now joined her.

"And do you think that I could remain quiescent here while my husband probably lies maimed and bleeding, if not dead, in the mine, every second of suspense a century of agony to him?

"No, a thousand times no!" and hastening to her room, Dainty soon reappeared, wrapping a handkerchief about her head and hurried down to Jennie.

But before leaving the house, she turned and called to Bentley:

"Please remain and guard the house, Mr. Bentley; that is a man's work."

"Where pain and suffering are, there is a woman's duty."

And unlocking the door, she hurried out, followed by Jenny, and half-ran, half-walked in the direction of the shaft.

It was a tedious and painful path they followed, for instead of going to the road and taking the course Kit and his companions had followed, she struck straight across the hill and scrambled along over the rocks and stones, which cut and bruised her tender feet, yet never faltering, never hesitating, she hurried on until at length they reached the mouth of the shaft, up which a few faint streaks of smoke were still curling.

And here the dismantled shed, the wrecked and twisted windlass, the timbers scattered about showed how terrible the force of the explosion had been, and for a moment her heart failed her.

But she quickly recovered, and leaning as far over the mouth of the pit as she dared, she cried in anguish-stricken accents:

"Kit! Kit! Answer me, my darling, and tell me you are not hurt!"

But the only answer the shaft gave back was the echo of her tones, and call as she would, she could get no other response.

The night was rapidly coming down and there was no one in sight, while she realized that even if the miners had heard the explosion they would pay no attention to it, thinking, as they doubtless would, that it was caused by some one blasting in the neighborhood, and would not come to investigate the matter.

For a moment she thought of going to Golden Gulch for aid, but she could not bear to leave the spot, which might, for aught she knew, be her husband's tomb, so, haggard and worn, turned to Jenny and whispered:

"What shall we do! Oh, what can we do!"

But the girl could only shake her head in despair and look down into the mass of timbers that blocked the shaft.

And while she leaned far over, her emotions mastered her, and forgetting all else but the fact that the man she now knew she loved was down in that black darkness, she shrieked with a voice compared to which that of Dainty had been but a faint cry:

"Charley! Charley! Are you alive? Oh! do tell me!"

And from far under the earth, and sounding to her like the rustling of an angel's wing, so happy did the response make her, came the answering call:

"The live-est man in America, Jenny, but in rather close quarters. Can you help us?"

"And are the rest unhurt?"

"Not a scratch on one of us. The rock has just stopped falling, but it made such a noise that we could hear nothing."

"Try and get us out, for we are not very comfortable."

And then Jenny, rising, seized both of Mrs. Barton's hands, and then threw her arms about her neck, while she burst into tears of joy.

Important as it was that they should hurry, Dainty could not refrain from whispering:

"Why, Jenny, I did not know that you cared so much for Charley!"

"Neither did I," returned the happy, blushing girl, "until just now."

And then they had to kiss each other effusively, and then cry a little, womanlike, when Dainty, stepping to the edge of the shaft, cried:

"Kit, do you hear me?"

"Perfectly, my darling."

"I am going to Golden Gulch for aid. Be of good courage, for you will soon be released."

"All right," answered the young fellow, cheerily; "we'll wait."

And at the grim jest his companions laughed heartily, the passage and shaft forming a sort of speaking trumpet that made their snickers distinctly audible.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SAVED.

So Dainty and Jenny started off toward Golden Gulch, and hurried as fast as they could along the road, being much relieved, on nearing the town, to meet Amos Baldwin, the young foreman, who was on his way to the cottage, he explained, to report to Mr. Barton that their all-day search for the Mad Miner had been unsuccessful, and that no trace of him could be found anywhere.

"Never mind that now, Mr. Baldwin," interrupted Dainty hastily, for she knew all the men who were employed by her husband by name.

"There has been an explosion at the mine, and my husband and four others are buried in the cavern.

"An explosion, Mrs. Barton? How could that happen? We use no explosives about the place, and there must be some mistake."

"Mistake or not, they are in the mine, and cannot escape."

"Hasten to the town and collect as many of the men as you can, and hurry to the mine. I am fearful lest some new cave may occur and injure them."

"I will be there almost as soon as you are, Mrs. Barton, and with a hundred as willing hearts and sturdy hands as can be found in the State!" And turning, he darted off at full speed, while the two girls retraced their steps to the shaft and sat there, cheering the imprisoned men by assuring them that help would soon arrive.

And soon a murmur of voices down the road and a glare of light announced that the relief was coming and soon the band of miners, headed by Baldwin and many of them carrying flaming and smoking torches, came around the Bend and walked up the hill to the shaft, each one, as he came in sight of the two women, removing his hat and greeting them roughly but kindly.

For Kit was idolized by his men and much of their affection extended to Dainty, who always had a pleasant word for them and had more than once visited them when injured or ill.

The men were quickly divided into two bands by Amos Baldwin, and he, heading one, started down the hill-side to attack the cavern from the opening through which the detective had looked into Kit's mine, while the other party proceeded to remove the piled-up timbers from the mouth of the shaft.

"Never fear, leddies," said one of these huge men, as he tossed the heavy beams right and left, "we'll save Mister Barton, an' his freen's an' thent 'ithout harm, too!"

"You can hear 'em callin' to us, an' they're no ways hurt, fer ther props hez made a roof over 'em, an' nothin' hain't fallen onter 'em."

And so with many cheering words the miners worked away, gradually clearing a passage down the shaft, being relieved by their comrades when they became fatigued.

But a short time after Baldwin had dis-

peared into the darkness he returned followed by the men who had accompanied him, and seemed to press closely about something carried in the center of the crowd by four of their number.

Approaching Mrs. Barton, Baldwin spoke to her, first asking her to step to one side and asking Jenny to join them, while the men who followed him stopped some little distance off.

"The whole mountain seems to have caved in on the other side, and it is useless to endeavor to pierce an entrance in that direction, so we have abandoned the attempt and returned here to lend such assistance as we can.

"But we have made an important capture, for in the hole which leads from the bed of the creek to the underground passage, we found the Mad Miner.

"He was lying on his back, having been struck down by a huge rock which had rolled from above and struck him just as he was about to crawl out."

"He is not dead!" whispered Dainty, awestricken by this punishment which had been so suddenly inflicted on the maniac.

"No, only severely hurt, for the stone struck him on the back of the head, inflicting a deep-scalp-wound, but which, I think will not result seriously although he is now insensible."

"And it was to tell this that you called us to one side?"

"Yes, Mrs. Barton, for I do not want the men to know that the probable murderer of Morton Watson and Jake Yerka is in their power, for there are some rough customers among them and the result might be serious."

"My own men I made promise not to harm him, and I can control them, but I wished to get permission from you to have the madman carried to your stable where he can be cared for in Old Pete's room, and where he can be watched."

"Why, certainly, direct your men to carry him there at once: I cannot leave this place until I see my husband once more safe and sound."

So Baldwin, returning to the little group that was still standing awaiting his orders some distance away, directed them to carry the madman to Kit's stable, and to there watch him carefully, first, however, asking the doctor—Gordon—to examine the man's wound.

After a careful scrutiny which lasted several minutes the doctor said:

"Nothing dangerous, the skull not being even splintered: a pretty thick head that man has got, I am sure."

"But, boys, when he recovers his senses, be very careful; either he will be a raving maniac, a hundred times more so than before he received this blow, or he will be completely restored to his senses."

"In the former case, look out for yourselves; in the latter, send for me; I cannot go with you, as I may be needed here."

And then the blanket being lifted, the half-dozen men who carried it started off slowly toward the cottage, while the doctor and Baldwin gained the rest of the men at the mouth of the shaft, which had by this time been nearly cleared of the debris which choked it.

But many hands make light work and soon the miners were able to begin to hew a path through the passage that led to the cavern, and they quickly approached the spot, where the five men were imprisoned and at length drew them out, one by one.

Charley was the only one injured, his left arm being broken in two places and his foot badly crushed, for the timbers had fallen toward the center of the mine in such a manner that they had formed a roof and sheltered them from the falling masses of rock that otherwise would have crushed them.

And then they were hoisted up to the surface, Charley being the first and as Jenny caught sight of the brave young fellow who would not tell her that he was hurt, and saw his arm hanging uselessly by his side, his bleeding foot and his face drawn with pain, she rushed forward and grasping his sound hand cried:

"You are not dangerously hurt?"

"No, there is no serious damage— Darling!" It was a very faint whisper and a very small word but the girl blushed as if the whole world had heard it, looking meantime intensely happy and perfectly ready to cry.

But then, she was a woman, which explains this apparent infelicity.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IDENTIFIED.

KIT was the last one to leave the mine, and after kissing his wife and still holding her hand in his, he turned to the men, and said:

"Boys, I cannot tell you how grateful I am to

you for so promptly coming to my assistance, and I will try and thank you to-morrow, for now it is late and I suppose that you are tired.

"But before you go, I want to ask if any of you have any idea how this accident happened?"

There was a dead silence for a few moments, and then Baldwin stepped forward and said:

"Mr. Barton, we have captured the Mad Miner."

"Indeed, and where?"

And having learned the facts and that he had been taken to the cottage, Kit asked:

"While you were working about there—for you say it took some little time to dig him out—did you notice anything that could furnish a clew to this explosion?"

"No, sir."

"Had you been using any powder, dynamite, or any other explosive about the mine within the past few days?"

"None at all."

"Then what could have caused this?"

"If yer please, sir," said one of Kit's miners, stepping out and looking much abashed at speaking before so many auditors, "w'en I picked up ther Mad Miner, I seen somethin' in his hand, an' took hol' of it ter see w'ot it war, an' it war this!" and he handed a half-a-dozen matches to Kit, one of which was half-burnt.

"An' then I found this," continued the speaker, opening his other hand, and disclosing a piece of fuse an inch or two long, which had evidently been cut or broken off the end of a longer strand, for it was the sealed end which had to be removed before the fuse could be lighted.

"This yer war lyin' near whar we foun' the Mad Miner, and when, arter we had dug him out, I found ther powder marks along ther bed o' ther creek whar ther fuse had burnt."

"So," said Kit, musingly, "the Mad Miner had watched us into the cave, and having his infernal machine already prepared, has tried to blow us all up together; but, thank Heaven! he has failed in his plans."

"Not quite," growled Charley, "and I think you had better put a stopper on your tongue and let the doctor come and fix my arm; it's beginning to hurt fearfully."

"A thousand pardons, Charley," cried Kit. "I forgot all about you. We'll hurry home at once; good-night, boys."

"Good-night, sir; good-night, ledgies," replied a hundred voices, and as the miners started toward Golden Gulch, the others proceeded in the direction of the cottage, Frank, Dan, Kit and the detective carrying Charley, who insisted that Jenny should walk close beside him.

"I say, Charley," cried Kit, as they were nearing the house, "I would have won my bet in the mine if you had taken it, wouldn't I?"

"You would indeed, Kit, and if you insist, I will have to ask Jenny to pay the wager."

"What was the wager?" asked the young girl, innocently.

"When it is time to pay, I'll remind you of it soon enough," laughed Kit, and they having by this time reached the cottage, Charley was carefully laid on the sofa in the parlor, where Doctor Gordon attended to his fractures and bound up his foot, while Jenny brought water, soap, bandages and towels, and played the part of devoted nurse to perfection.

Meantime the others walked out to the stable, where the Mad Miner lay, being accompanied by Bentley, who had descended on hearing them return, and congratulated them upon their escape.

Henry, he said, was still irrational and unable to recognize any one, although much better, his delirium not being so great and he giving indications of soon recovering.

Reaching the stable Kit rewarded the men who had carried the miner thither and bade them good-night, telling them that their services were no longer needed and thanking them for their assistance, and then, they having gone, he approached the cot and looked down on the unconscious man.

The eyes were closed, the look of fierce wildness being hidden and the lurid glare no longer shining from those glowing orbs.

And as Kit looked, again there came to him the same feeling that had once before assailed him, that this face was not unknown to him, but so covered was it with a year's growth of bushy hair, and matted beard, so stained and tanned and weather-beaten, that it would have been almost impossible to recognize his nearest friend under that disguise.

And as he stood there, the man opened his eyes and looked at him, the steady light of rea-

son shining clear and bright, showing that what the doctor had prophesied had come to pass and that he was perfectly sane once more.

He glanced around with a puzzled expression, and then, happening to lift his arm and seeing the rags that half-covered it he asked:

"What does this mean? Who has clothed me in these tattered garments? And my beard," raising it with his thin fingers, "how comes it to be bleached?"

"And where am I?—and who are you? and you? and you?" angrily.

"I am Kit Barton—"

"What, you Kit Barton? Why, Kit Barton is dead, dead I say; I know it."

"Well if he is, he is, so long as you are certain of it," said Kit to humor him, "but how do you feel? Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, you can tell me who that man is," cried the ex-maniac, now for the first time catching sight of Bentley.

"That, sir, is Mr. Curtis Bentley, of—"

"It is a lie! a lie!" shrieked the man, his insanity returning more violently than ever. "I saw him myself, bathed in blood! blood! tossing in his agony and the red fluid spurting from the wound in his side."

"And he died then and there, and now I know where I am; with the spirits of the lost and doomed to writhe forever in eternal fire."

"But you shall go with me before his Satanic Majesty and tell him that I did not murder you, for I will not be punished unjustly!"

And before they could seize and restrain him, he had leaped on Bentley and hurled him to the floor, when, throwing himself on the prostrate man, he tore and gashed his throat so with his teeth that it seemed as if a wild beast had been chawing it.

And then, as he howled and shrieked in his maniacal rage, he burst a blood-vessel in his chest, a red and frothy stream gushed from his lips and he turned over on his side and lay dying beside his last victim. Like a flash Kit recognized him and cried:

"Great Heavens! it is Craig Colton!"

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

AND so it proved to be, for when the Maniac Miner was raised up and his face having been clean-shaven and his hair cut, thus making him look less like an outcast, the features of Colton were plainly distinguishable and there could be no doubt that it was he who had so long masqueraded as the Mad Miner.

Bentley was stone dead, for his jugular-vein had been cut by the gnawing teeth of the maniac and he had choked to death a moment after the tearing fangs had met in his throat.

So the two bodies were laid out side by side in the stable and, the door being locked, the party all returned to the house, where they found Charley resting much easier.

Having carried him to his room and put him in bed, his friends told him of their discovery and how the Mad Miner had proven to be Craig Colton.

"Then, as there is no doubt about his death, Henry will have no trouble in securing possession of the Faithful mine," said Frank, "and he now owns all of it, for Bentley, poor fellow! left him his undivided half by the will he made and signed in our presence, last night."

"That is true," acquiesced Kit, "and a nice little piece of property it is, too. You fellows clear out now and go to bed; I will look after Harry, and you, Frank, can take care of Charley; but before we break up let me caution you never to mention to the boy that we found his father alive, or that he killed Bentley. Better lead him to believe that it was an accident that caused the latter's death and that it happened in the mine."

"Bentley will be buried before the boy recovers his reason and he need not have this additional shame added to what he already knows."

"You are right, and I am sure that we will be careful to spare Harry any additional humiliation."

To this Fox, Dr. Gordon and Dan readily agreeing, the matter was settled and they all separated, going their different ways, the doctor dropping in for a moment to see Henry.

Soon all were asleep and nothing occurred to disturb the quiet of the night, so when morning came, Kit had to tell Dainty and Jenny of the manner in which Bentley had met his death; then, all going out, for the boy was sleeping quietly, the two bodies were placed in coffins that Dan and Frank had made and lowered into their graves.

The career of the Mad Miner was run and by his side lay the man he had so cruelly wronged and then led into the path of crime; and when they returned to the house, they all sat silent for a time thinking of all they had passed through together, when Kit broke the silence:

"Now that we have discovered the mystery surrounding the Mad Miner," said he, "it is easy to understand all these plots against us. Baffled, while sane, in all he attempted, the one fixed idea his brain bore was to carry out what he considered his vengeance, and, with the cunning of a madman he tried to get rid of all who thwarted him in his efforts to obtain possession of Dainty's fortune."

"That is the explanation of the matter, without doubt," added Frank, "and we can feel safer now that he is no more."

"Kit," interrupted Dainty, "all these scenes of horror have disgusted me with this place. Can we not go away for a time until the memory of past events is a little less vivid?"

"You have only anticipated what I was going to suggest, my darling, for I would not have you remain here a day longer than is necessary. As soon as Harry is able to travel we will go to Denver and have Bentley's will probated and put the boy in possession of his property, and then start for San Francisco and thence sail on our proposed cruise."

"I will occupy the few days that remain in seeing to the clearing out of my mine and will put Baldwin in entire charge; and when Harry recovers I will suggest to him that he gives Amos the management of the Faithful mine too, for I know of no one who is more faithful and honest."

"Only one thing is now unsettled," and turning to Jenny he asked: "Well, little one, are you going with us?"

And she, with face like fire, murmured:

"It depends on what Charley says."

"Well, suppose you just run up-stairs and ask him; I know that you are dying for some excuse to get away."

She evidently was, for she did not wait to be told twice, but fairly flew out of the room and bounded up-stairs.

It was at least two hours afterward when she returned and, going up to Kit, she said:

"Charley says I owe you something."

"Owe me? What?" replied Kit feigning astonishment.

"This," and stooping quickly she kissed him before he could realize her intention.

"Oh, ho!" cried Frank, "that is the way the wind sets, is it? Then come here, my pretty sister and make friends with your brother."

When they had quieted down somewhat, Jenny told them that Charley would be only too glad to go, provided his arm was well enough, but that he did not want to detain them.

"Nonsense!" cried Kit. "As if we would go without you! I'm master of that stanch craft, the 'Dainty,' and I'd like to see her set sail without my orders!"

"No, indeed! Instead of making a mere pleasure cruise of it, we'll make our voyage a bridal tour, and you and Charley can enact the roles of bride and groom."

"Then, sir," replied Jenny saucily, and sweeping him a pretty courtesy, "we will accept your invitation, and I will go and tell him that everything is settled."

Again she disappeared, and was seen no more until dinner-time.

Frank insisted that there was no necessity of Kit's remaining to oversee the work of restoring the mine, as he himself could attend to it without assistance; and, as Dainty was evidently anxious to leave, he assented, and departed the next day for Denver and San Francisco, accompanied by Dainty and Jenny, while the others remained behind to settle up matters and nurse Charley and Harry Colton into convalescence, Baldwin meanwhile moving into the cottage and taking up his quarters permanently.

The two—Harry and Charley—rapidly grew better, although the former came near having a relapse when he heard of the death of Bentley, and mourned him long and sincerely; and some weeks after, the five friends—Frank, Charley, Dan, Fox and Harry—left Golden Gulch for Denver amid many good wishes from their friends, settled up their business and took rail for San Francisco, where they found Mr. and Mrs. Barton and Jenny awaiting them.

The marriage between Charley and his bride having been solemnized, all boarded the yacht, the anchor was weighed, and before many hours only a thin trail of smoke on the horizon showed where the "Dainty" had disappeared.

THE END.

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